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Rüdiger Lohlker | Katharina Ivanyi (Eds.)

Humanitarian Islam

Reflecting on an Islamic Concept

BRILL | SCHÖNINGH

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RAHMAH

Humanitarian Islam

Religion and Transformation in Contemporary European Society

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Introducing a Concept

Humanitarian Islam

Katharina Ivanyi, Rüdiger Lohlker

Abstract

Humanitarian Islam is an innovative concept that has begun emerging from the traditions of Islam in Indonesia in recent years. The most important contemporary Islamic organizations in Indonesia support it. Nevertheless, it seems to be unknown beyond the Southeast Asian context – despite its global potential, aspirations and claims. Moreover, the concept has not received any academic attention so far. This volume presents reflections on the idea of Humanitarian Islam by Muslim and non-Muslim scholars from Europe and beyond.

Key Words

Humanitarian Islam, Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama, Indigenization

1 Introduction

The concept of Humanitarian Islam has emerged in recent years as a key notion in the discourse of a number of important representatives of the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and its affiliated youth movement, Gerakan Pemuda Ansor. In the context of the long and complex history of Islam in Southeast Asia, as well as in light of the enormous transformations wrought by modernity and current processes of globalization, entailing profound economic, cultural and geo-political shifts, the idea of a Humanitarian Islam, centered on tolerance, compassion and the value of diversity, undoubtedly deserves attention. It does so from a political as much as from a scholarly perspective.

The lived experience of Indonesian Islam, in all its complexity, historically and in contemporary context, lies at the basis of the emergence of the idea of a Humanitarian Islam, even if past reality may not have always met the ideals set forth by today's movement. Indeed, the manifestos advocating for a Humanitarian Islam invoke a highly romanticized image of "Islam

Nusantara" – an idealized vision of an essentially pluralistic kind of Indonesian Islam – to oppose the pernicious influence of a (similarly essentialized) Salafi or Wahhabi kind of "Arab Islam" – imported into Indonesia, but ultimately alien to its indigenous traditions of diversity and inclusiveness. While such essentialized and essentializing categories and projections need to be met with great caution and a critical sense of awareness of the intricacies of Indonesian politics, both past and present, the call for more inclusive political and social engagement, in itself, seems positive. The question is how such "ideals" will ultimately be translated into action, i.e. what concrete forms they will be given in actual social, political, economic and cultural terms. The extent to which the statements of those calling for Humanitarian Islam will succeed in avoiding political instrumentalization, in the context of a highly partisan political scene, will be decisive for the ultimate success or failure of the movement as it develops. The history of Indonesia – the largest Muslim-majority country in the world – and that of its largest Islamic organization, the NU, in fact offer the keys to a better understanding of the genesis of the particular call for Humanitarian Islam voiced in recent years, in light of the manifold social, political and economic challenges faced by the country and the wider Islamic world.

The broader Indian Ocean world of South and Southeast Asia, the cradle of the ideas and practices of Islam in Indonesia, has been an Islamic ecumene since the beginning of the early modern period. While the spread of Islam to Indonesia remains subject to much debate among historians, it is clear that from the time of the Muslim trading empires of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and certainly from the rise of the "new" Islamic states in the sixteenth century, Indonesia became fully embedded in the networks of the "Balkans-to-Bengal-complex" (Ahmed 2016) – a realm providing the venue for new expressions of Islam in the framework of what M. C. Ricklefs has dubbed the *mystic synthesis* (Ricklefs 2007).[1] With the beginning of the nineteenth century and the Dutch colonial wars, Javanese society, in particular, was transformed in a process that would lay the foundations for "modern Indonesian Islam" (Ricklefs 2007 and Van Reybrouck 2022).[2] This process furthered what could be termed the "indigenization" of Shafi'i *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and other

1 For a more detailed outline of the history of the Islamization of Indonesia and debates over what would constitute Islamic orthodoxy and orthopraxy there, see the contribution in this volume by Ghazaleh Faridzadeh.

2 Cf. also the contribution on Islamic heritage in this volume by Rüdiger Lohlker. For the way "colonial scholarship interpreted the precolonial, and then inflected particular strands of reformist Sufi self-critique into modernist discourse," see Laffan 2011.

disciplines of Islam in Indonesia.[3] Mahmood Kooria analyzes this process of indigenization or, as he calls it, "provincialization", as follows:[4]

> In the interactions between Arabs, Asians and Africans, Islamic law provided a shared vocabulary across the Indian Ocean world. Islamic law was not merely brought there, but has been produced in that world through constant and critical engagements. While the legal and theological scaffolds supporting Islamic practices were circulating, Indian Ocean Muslims reformulated, produced and transmitted them in their own individual ways. Rather than describing a purely cosmopolitan perspective of these connections blown across waves and through sails, we ask what other insights this oceanic world can give us on the ideas, practices and texts of Islamic law.[5]

Kooria emphasizes "the importance of local dynamics and modes of placemaking".[6] This "localized" Islam is the canvas upon which the recent concept of Humanitarian Islam must be situated and understood; and this must be done with the various "others" in mind that serve to delimit the particular local identity, as articulated in emic narratives thereof.

A crucial moment in recent Indonesian history, in this regard, was the publication in 2009 of the book *Ilusi Negra Islam*[7], which criticized the attempt by Salafi and Wahhabi forces, as well as forces related to the Muslim Brotherhood, to bring "Arab Islam," or what has been framed as such, to Indonesia, in order to subdue indigenous (and indigenized) forms of Islamic expression. This criticism forms part of a wider range of attempts to promote an anti-extremist, "moderate" Islam, based on discourses that emphasize the possibility and necessity of harmonious social relations, democratic engagement and mutual cooperation. Central to this is the notion of "Islam Nusantara" – a term both descriptive and prescriptive, as Saskia Schäfer has recently pointed out.[8] Schäfer argues that:

> [...] while the concept and term "Islam Nusantara" is new in its current variant – closely tied to a particular group of thinkers within NU – most of what the term describes is neither new nor as locally specific to Southeast Asia as the term suggests. The term encapsulates a thousand-year-old practice of plurality and ideals of pluralism that has been historically more typical for Islamicate societies than modern readings often acknowledge. Second, while it describes a lived reality, "Islam Nusantara" has also become a normative call for renewed pride in and

3 Cf. the contribution by Lohlker on "Fiqh reconsidered," in this volume.

4 Cf. also Kooria 2022.

5 Kooria and Ravensbergen 2022, p. 1.

6 Kooria and Ravensbergen 2022, p. 1.

7 Cf. Wahid 2009.

8 Schäfer 2021, p. 1.

> support for diversity of practice and belief. It is a call issued in a deeply competitive landscape in which a variety of actors link religion to politics in new and intense ways, but at the same time "Islam Nusantara" continues to contain some remnants of the foundational vision of Nahdlatul Ulama.[9]

The proponents of Humanitarian Islam explicitly champion "Islam Nusantara" in their call to establish and uphold the values of diversity and tolerance. In a 2015 article entitled "How Islam learned to adapt in Nusantara," for instance, NU General Secretary Yayha Cholil Staquf argues that in light of the great ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity of the Indonesian archipelago, the vast region extending from Sumatra in the west to Papua in the east, "Nusantara societies" have been inherently adaptive in welcoming and assimilating a variety of cultural and religious influences. Islam in Indonesia, Staquf argues, developed in a climate of openness quite distinct from the "Middle Eastern model," where military conquest, subjugation and a spirit of Muslim "supremacy" characterized the process of Islamization.[10] While the historical accuracy of this narrative is debateable – indeed the process of Islamization of what we now call the Middle East was a highly protracted and complex affair, much less violent than portrayed by Staquf – the point is not so much the degree to which this image conforms to actual fact. The point is the consequences of these "facts" in the present, and their bearing on the future. That is to say, what matters is the purpose to which arguments such as those of Staquf are fielded: a particular, highly idealized experience of the past is invoked to overcome the challenges of the present – conflict, violence, and strife, which themselves are understood as paradigmatic, albeit of Nusantara Islam's opposite. A negatively essentialized "Middle Eastern model" is thus juxtaposed to the "Indonesian model," which is presented as a way out for the future: an "offer to the world," as Staquf states, for "an alliance of civilizations."[11]

While the historical experience of pluralism in the Islamic world is certainly not exclusive to Indonesia, as Schäfer has rightly pointed out, it is the vehemence with which that claim is put forth by the proponents of Humanitarian Islam, in the context of the contemporary experience of conflict, violence, sectarianism, and assertions of supremacy, made by various groups, that is ultimately significant. The question that is decisive for the future is whether or not the proponents of Humanitarian Islam will ultimately manage to transcend political and religious partisanship in a way that will allow their call to resonate and translate into concrete action. The contributions to this volume

9 Schäfer 2021, p. 1.
10 Staquf 2015, p. 22.
11 Staquf 2015, p. 28.

represent reflections on the notion of Humanitarian Islam by European scholars of a variety of backgrounds and disciplinary approaches. The aim is to introduce the concept to a broader audience beyond Indonesia and Southeast Asia, in the hope is to start a conversation on the manifold questions raised by its emergence. The authors have tried to link these to a number of debates regarding the relationship of religion and politics in other parts of Asia, Europe and North America, stressing their relevance in transnational, interfaith and secular contexts.

2 Humanitarian Islam: This Volume

Alina Alak opens the series of reflections in this volume with a presentation of what she calls a "humanist" Qur'anic hermeneutics. Alak analyses the fundamental principles of Humanitarian Islam, as presented in the *Nusantara Manifesto*, in light of a range of progressive contemporary approaches, as a case study of hermeneutical and exegetical relevance. Exploring how the concept of *raḥmah*, understood as universal love and compassion by the proponents of Humanitarian Islam, is used as a meta-textual ethical principle that precedes and transcends the Qur'an, Alak's contribution considers how the principles of Humanitarian Islam allow for plural textual interpretations, epistemological fluidity, soteriological openness and religious pluralism. Alak sees Humanitarian Islam as aspiring to participate in a humanist paradigm, despite a selective focus on certain social and political problems over others, including the neglect of important issues in the field of inter-Muslim confessional divides and gender relations.

Hüseyin Çiçek takes the history of secularization in Germany, from the Middle Ages into the early modern and modern periods, as the springboard for his reflections upon wider questions regarding the place of religion, and religious politics, within the secular nation-state. Juxtaposing the experiences of Germany and the Turkey (Çiçek presents the latter as a case in which religion is instrumentalized for the sake of an ethno-nationalist state project), the chapter argues that "political neutrality" in religious affairs, including the equal treatment of the followers of all religions, is a *sine qua non* for democratic engagement and cooperation. Çiçek connects this to the Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam and its rejection of the idea of a universal Islamic state (*khilāfa*), closing with reflections on the possible role of Humanitarian Islam as a way out of the current Turkish predicament.

Examining the 2017 *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam* from a Catholic Christian theological perspective, Jakob Deibl argues

that Humanitarian Islam represents an opportunity for both Muslims and Christians to critically examine their respective traditions and engage in meaningful dialogue in the of face the manifold challenges of today's world, as believers, side by side, rather than in a spirit of antagonism. Deibl engages with a range of issues raised by the declaration. These include the question of how to renounce a discourse of supremacy and exclusion, countering it with the spirit of openness, compassion and mutually enriching exchange. In addition, Deibl emphasizes the role of art and the necessity of an aesthetic translation of the pronouncements of Humanitarian Islam for new forms of expression and exchange to truly come alive.

Ghazaleh Faridzadeh engages the concept of tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*) and the idea of religious pluralism as deeply anchored in the Islamic tradition by examining the teachings of Ibn ʿArabī in the context of the reception of the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, the "Oneness of Being" or "Unity of Existence", in the context of Southeast Asian history. Faridzadeh outlines the process by which Islam spread to Indonesia, focussing on the role of Sufi thought and practice in the negotiation of "orthodoxy". The ideas of Ibn ʿArabī were of particular consequence in this process. Arguing that Ibn ʿArabī's thought can be considered one of the foundations for the development of a positive appreciation of diversity and pluralism within the Islamic discursive tradition, Faridzadeh sketches the influence of such notions on Nahdlatul Ulama and the movement of Humanitarian Islam. The chapter closes with reflections on the transformative potential of ideas, and its limitations, in the context of the manifold material constraints of social life.

Yunus Hentschel addresses several core ideas of Humanitarian Islam against selected voices from the "polyphonic" field of present-day Sufism. With the aim of countering a number of prevalent misconceptions regarding premodern, modern and contemporary Islam, Hentschel calls for a more differentiated perspective on various categories propounded in the manifestos for Humanitarian Islam. In order to enhance the project of furthering a truly pluralist exchange, Hentschel illustrates the inconstancies and, at times, exclusionary thrust of some of the collective attributions articulated in the texts of Humanitarian Islam. This concerns categories such as "Sufism", "Salafism", "politicized" Islam, etc. Focussing on the notions of *sharīʿa* and *raḥma*, Hentschel shows that the vision of Humanitarian Islam is, in fact, shared by many contemporary Muslims in the Middle East and the wider Islamic world. It is a vision focused on Sufi understandings of *raḥma* and *sharīʿa* that emphasize spiritual and ethical labour to uphold not a rigid system of rules, but the possibility of growth and engagement.

In the context of the translation of his book *Islam, Authoritarianism, Underdevelopment: A Global and Historical Comparison* into Indonesian, Ahmet Kuru describes the efforts of leading members of Nahdlatul Ulama to offer a response to militant extremist movements, such as IS or the Taliban. Kuru sketches a picture of "tolerant" vs. "intolerant" Islam in Indonesia and reflects on possible repercussions of Humanitarian Islam on Muslims in the Middle East.

Rüdiger Lohlker offers two contributes to this volume. In his first article, Lohlker analyzes a collection of Arabic texts, published by NU scholars, delineating the Islamic doctrinal positions Nahdlatul Ulama understands as essential. The wide range of material covered in these texts include approaches from Sufism, applied Islamic law, Shāfiʿite legal theory, Qur'anic commentary, Hadith, Islamic doctrine and theology. Lohlker contextualizes the texts in question in the framework of the culture of learning cultivated in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in Indonesia. Moreover, Lohlker reads the texts as part of the ongoing process of "indigenization" of Islam (*pibumisasi Islam*). This indigenization or "provincialization", as Mahmood Kooria has called it (cf. above), is studied from the perspective of the historical development of Islam in Indonesia. One significant feature of the ideology of NU, discussed in the chapter, is their claim to be representatives of *Aswaja* (Ar. *ahl al-sunna waʾl-jamāʿa*). Lohlker embeds this, and other aspects of NU rhetoric, in the context of current Indonesian "soft power", i.e. a strategy of Indonesian diplomacy, within which the new phenomenon of Humanitarian Islam must be understood.

Lohlker's second contribution to this volume is likewise dedicated to the process of indigenization – this time as the framework within which the historical development of Islamic law (*fiqh*) in Indonesia can be analyzed. Lohlker asks to what extent modern notions such as universal human rights, religious freedom or the rule of law may be integrated into the complex edifice of legal principles and substantive doctrine of a normative tradition which has evolved over many centuries, such as the Islamic one. Surveying the process of "purposeful selection" characterizing the mixed nature of Islamic and customary law in early modern Southeast Asia, Lohlker shows how nineteenth century European scholarship came to read this as "corruption," juxtaposing a supposedly authentic "Islamic" law with "un-Islamic" local custom – a notion that, in turn, was picked up by certain strands of Muslim modernists. Against this, Lohlker presents a number of contemporary developments, such as the case of an Indonesian school of Islamic law on inheritance, as an attempt to assert a modern and consciously Indonesian Islamic identity. Stressing

the importance of the notion of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿa* in these debates, Lohlker argues that the call for Humanitarian Islam, in particular its demand of a "new *ijtihād*", should be read in this framework. Indeed, the centrality of *fiqh* in both the Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration and the Nusantara Manifesto cannot be overestimated.

3 Soft Power and Humanitarian Islam

Among various other things, Humanitarian Islam must be understood as a soft power tool of Indonesian cultural diplomacy.[12] Highlighting Indonesia's place among a range of geo-political actors from the Muslim and non-Muslim world, Humanitarian Islam can, indeed, be analyzed as a powerful discursive strategy of Indonesian foreign policy. A good example of this "soft power" may be the R20 meeting organized on Bali in November 2022, in the context of the G20 summit.

No Indonesian government can afford to ignore the symbolic capital engendered by the world's largest Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), in terms of size and purchase, when it comes to leverage diplomatic power vis-à-vis other Muslim-majority countries and on the global stage generally. We may call it a natural alliance of political actors with interests in both the national and international spheres. Two texts form the milieu of Humanitarian Islam may illustrate this foreign policy aspect of the movement well. In July 2020 a communiqué was issued, stating that Yahya Cholil Staquf, NU General Secretary and one of the most influential figures supporting the Humanitarian Islam movement, joined an international commission dedicated to formulate a new Indo-Pacific strategy, together with highly influential figures from the USA, Canada, and the United Kingdom.[13] In April 2017 similarly, the Gerakan Pemuda Ansor, the most prominent organization of young adult Muslims in Indonesia, often dubbed the NU's youth organization and, at the same time, one of the most important actors in the Humanitarian Islam movement, issued a communiqué on the "Republic of Indonesia's strategic interests and national security agenda."[14] In presenting its views on Indonesia's national security interests so explicitly, it unmistakably claimed its place in the wider

12 Following Nye, soft power is here understood as "the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercion or payment." See Nye 2017, p. 1. For an Indonesian view on soft power and soft diplomacy cf. Yani and Lusiana 2018, pp. 45–69; for an analysis of the international role of Indonesia, see Acharya 2014. For the cultural dimension of Indonesia's foreign policy, see Carbó-Catalan/Roig-Sanz 2022.

13 Baytarrahma July 2020.

14 Baytarrahma April 2017.

Indonesian political process, not only in terms of national policy, but also as a stakeholder in the formulation of foreign and security policy. In an article in the journal *Strategic Review* titled "Indonesia's 'Big Idea': Resolving the bitter global debate on Islam," Mustofa Bisri and Holland Taylor describe this soft power approach as a process requiring systematic effort:

> Yet obviously, there is no guarantee that Indonesia's unique potential in the realm of cultural and spiritual diplomacy will ever be realized. The projection of strategic influence requires power, systematically and intelligently applied over time to achieve specific goals. Doing so in this complex field will require an effective public-private partnership. It will also require that a critical mass of Indonesia's elites candidly acknowledge and address a number of factors that not only obstruct the realization of this potential, but threaten to undermine and destroy its very foundations.[15]

This, next to its fundamental legal and ethical import, must not be neglected as an important aspect of the movement for Humanitarian Islam.

4 Resources for an Analysis of the Humanitarian Islam Movement

Documents issued by the movement, propounding the core concepts of Humanitarian Islam, are excerpted in the following and provided via links in the list of references. The core documents of the movement, advocating the concept of Humanitarian Islam are:

1) Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration – International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders (ISOMIL), which was presented at a conference in Jakarta in May 2016. The central principles of this declaration are as follows:

> 1. Nahdlatul Ulama offers the insights and experience of Islam Nusantara (East Indies Islam) to the world, as a salutary paradigm of Islam in which religion contributes to civilization, by respecting pre-existing cultures and prioritizing social harmony and peace.
> 2. Nahdlatul Ulama does not seek to "export" Islam Nusantara to other regions of the world. Rather, it is simply inviting others to recall the beauty and dynamism that emerged from the historic encounter of the spirit and teachings of Islam with the reality of local cultures throughout the world, which gave birth to numerous great civilizations, including that of the East Indies, or Malay, Archipelago.
> 3. Islam Nusantara is not a new or distinct religion. Rather, it is the expression of Islam that spontaneously flourished amid the culture of Nusantara, and does not conflict with Islamic *shari'a*, as understood, taught and practiced by the traditional *ahlussunnah wal jamaah* (Sunni Muslim) community worldwide.

15 Bisri/Taylor 2012, p. 34.

> 4. From the perspective of Islam Nusantara, no conflict exists between religion and nationalism. *Hubul watan minal iman*: "Patriotism is integral to faith." Whoever lacks patriotism either has no native land, or is devoid of attachment to it. Those who lack a native land will be devoid of history.
> 5. Within the worldview of Islam Nusantara, Islam does not enjoin its adherents to conquer the world, but rather, to engage in the continuous development of *akhlaqul karimah*, or noble character and virtue, for it is only through *akhlaqul karimah* that Islam can manifest as Divine Grace for all creation.
> 6. Islam Nusantara firmly adheres to, and enlivens, the fundamental teachings and values of Islam, including *tawassuth* (following the middle path, i.e., the path of moderation), *tawaazun* (balance; harmony), *tasaamuh* (gentle and loving rather than harsh and violent behavior, i.e., tolerance rather than compulsion) and *i'tidaal* (justice).
> 7. As the world's largest *ahlussunnah wal jamaah* (Sunni Muslim) organization, the Nahdlatul Ulama shares the concern felt by the vast majority of the world's Muslims, and non-Muslims, about the unchecked spread of religious extremism, terror, conflict in the Middle East and a rising tide of Islamophobia in the West.
> 8. The Nahdlatul Ulama regards specific modes of interpreting Islam (*tafsir*) as the most significant factor causing the spread of religious extremism among Muslims.[16]

These principles lead to a call to stand up against the politicization of Islam. Moreover, the declaration states that "the issues of poverty and injustice cannot be divorced from any comprehensive effort to address religious extremism and terrorism."[17] In addition, the text states that, "the Nahdlatul Ulama urges the Indonesian government to play an active and constructive role in seeking a resolution to the multi-faceted conflicts raging in the Middle East."[18] Finally, the text declares that Nahdlatul Ulama regards itself not as a mere tool of the Indonesian government but as an actor in its own right.

2) Gerakan Pemuda Ansor on Humanitarian Islam:

> On March 30th, 2017, Gerakan Pemuda Ansor (the Nahdlatul Ulama Young Adults Movement) announced the launch of a concerted effort to promote Humanitarian Islam (*al-islam li al-insaniyyah*), by developing and operationalizing a global strategy to recontextualize the teachings of orthodox, authoritative Islam and thereby reconcile certain problematic elements of classical Islamic law (*fiqh*, aka *shari'ah*) with the reality of contemporary civilization, whose context and conditions differ significantly from those in which classical Islamic law emerged.[19]

16 Baytarrahma October 2016, pp. 3–4.
17 Baytarrahma, "ISOMIL Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration," p. 4.
18 Baytarrahma October 2016, p. 4.
19 Baytarrahma March 2017.

> Gerakan Pemuda Ansor's inititative was part of the "5-year Work Program adopted at its November 2015 National Congress, and follows the May 2016 Global Unity-Forum.[20]

3) In May 2017 Gerakan Pemuda Ansor issued the "Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam. Towards the Recontextualization of Islamic Teachings, for the Sake of World Peace and Harmony Between Civilizations."[21] One of the starting points of this declaration was the following:

> Religious norms may be universal and unchanging – e.g., the imperative that one strive to attain moral and spiritual perfection – or they may be "contingent," if they address a specific issue that arises within the ever-changing circumstances of time and place. As reality changes, contingent – as opposed to universal – religious norms should also change to reflect the constantly shifting circumstances of life on earth. This was in fact the case during the early centuries of Islam, as various schools of Islamic law (*madzhab*) emerged and evolved. For the past five centuries, however, the practice of *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning, employed to create new religious norms) has generally lapsed throughout the Sunni Muslim world.[22]

Linking this idea to the history of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago, the declaration reads:

> In contrast to the disjunct between key tenets of Islamic orthodoxy and the actual reality that exists in much of the Muslim world, Indonesia has been blessed by the historic example of those, known as the *Wali Songo* (or "Nine Saints"), who proselytized *Islam Nusantara* ("East Indies Islam"). These Nine Saints and their followers stressed the need to contextualize Islamic teachings and adapt these to the ever-changing realities of space and time, while presenting Islam not as a supremacist ideology or vehicle for conquest, but rather, as one of many paths through which humans may attain spiritual perfection.[23]

Voicing a solution for the current crisis of the Islamic world, the declaration continues:

> The second choice – to develop a new religious sensibility that reflects the actual circumstances of our contemporary world – demands an altogether different type of courage, as well as a vast depth of wisdom and knowledge of the world we inhabit. For it requires Muslims to reevaluate a number of obsolete concepts that remain firmly entrenched within Islamic orthodoxy; develop new religious

20 Baytarrahma March 2017.
21 Baytarrahma April 2017, p. 2.
22 Baytarrahma April 2017, p. 4.
23 Baytarrahma April 2017, p. 6.

> teachings suitable to the modern era; and mobilize the political support necessary to establish an alternative religious authority that is capable of propagating and defending these new teachings as they gradually come to be accepted and observed in practice by the Muslim community as a whole, and eventually constitute a *new* authoritative orthodoxy.[24]

A detailed road map then sketches the next steps on the way to this "new authoritative orthodoxy." This road map is divided into five sections:

> Identification and Containment of the Threat (points 40–66); Conflict Resolution (points 67–72); New Theological Discourse to Recontextualize Islamic Teachings for the Modern Era (points 73–87); Development and Adoption of New Educational Curricula Throughout the Islamic World (points 88–95); and Grassroots Movement to Build Societal Consensus and the Political Will Necessary to Resolve the Crisis (points 96–112).[25]

4) On November 2017 the NU National Assembly and Conference issued a statement, "[targeting] the weaponization of religion for political purposes," the key points of which are likewise noteworthy:

> The government needs to act decisively to overcome the threat of radicalism by fostering a humanitarian approach" (Prevention and Combatting Radicalism, point 1); "Political parties and politicians must stop exploiting religious sentiment as a weapon in their political competition. The manipulation of religious sentiment in a constantly recurring power struggle – to obtain 5-year terms in office – constitutes highly irresponsible behavior that threatens the very life of our nation" (point 5); "Law enforcement officers must guarantee citizens' constitutional rights, refuse to buckle under to pressure from radical groups and firmly crack down on: a) any illegal acts conducted in the name of religion, especially hate speech and incitement to violence, so that [sectarian hatred and violence] do not spiral out of control; b) the use of religious sentiment as a weapon by political parties and politicians, so as to deter such behaviour.[26]

Significant in this context is that Nahdlatul Ulama explicitly "welcomed recent statements by the government of Saudi Arabia that it wishes to return to moderate Islam."[27] This statement by NU opened the prospect of what might seem an unlikely cooperation, the first outcomes of which was the Saudi-backed Muslim World League being invited to act as co-organizer, together with Nahdlatul Ulama, of the R20 summit in Bali in 2022, in the context of the wider G20 summit at the time.

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24 Baytarrahma April 2017, p. 9.

25 Baytarrahma April 2017, pp. 11–21.

26 Baytarrahma, November 2017, point 6.

27 Baytarrahma, November 2017.

5) On the basis of the Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration at ISOMIL, Gerakan Pemuda Ansor and Bayt ar-Rahmah, an NGO dedicated to further the ideas of Humanitarian Islam, issued the so-called *Nusantara Manifesto* in October 2018. The introduction of this manifesto reads as follows:

> The *Nusantara Manifesto* represents a significant milestone within a long-term, systematic campaign – guided by the spiritual leadership of the world's largest Muslim organization – designed to block the political weaponization of Islam, whether by Muslims or non-Muslims, and to curtail the spread of communal hatred by fostering the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order, founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being.[28]

In the context of our volume here, it is important to highlight the methodological approach of the *Nusantara Manifesto*:

> Part XI of the *Manifesto* (points 99–173) employs the science of *uṣūl al-fiqh* – the methodology of independent legal reasoning used to create Islamic law, or *fiqh* – to examine why it is theologically valid and necessary for contemporary Muslim scholars to recontextualize obsolete and problematic tenets within Islamic orthodoxy, which are used to justify religious hatred, supremacy and violence. Section §11.2 explains why changed circumstances necessitate new *ijtihād* to ensure the well-being of humanity (*maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*). Section §11.3 incorporates H.E. Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid's historic essay, "God Needs No Defense," while section §11.5 establishes a framework for the emergence of what the *Nusantara Manifesto* calls *fiqh al-ḥaḍārah al-ʿālamīyah almutaṣahirah* (Islamic jurisprudence for a global civilization, whose constituent elements retain their distinctive characteristics).[29]

The concept of *fiqh al-ḥaḍārah* evoked here marks the unfolding of a new approach to Islamic law, envisioned as part of a global civilization. In more general terms, the Manifesto declares:

> The Humanitarian Islam movement seeks to restore human nature to what Islam regards as its pure and original state (*fiṭrah*) – as symbolized by the act of God *breathing life* into the Prophet Adam – and to eliminate the widespread practice of using religion to incite hatred and violence towards others. […] *Fiṭrah* stands in fundamental opposition to tyranny (*ṭughyān*), which forcibly silences the liberating voice of conscience and subordinates it to the avaricious dictates of power. Just as *fiṭrah* is the negation of *ṭughyān*, so true religion manifested socially is the negation of the domination of others.[30]

28 Baytarrahma October 2018a, p. 3.
29 Baytarrahma October 2018a, p. 8.
30 Baytarrahma October 2018a, p. 13.

The methodology to be followed to hinder "tyranny" is described in the Manifesto as the recontextualization of Islamic teachings and the systematic reference to a distinction between immutable aspects of revelation and contingent responses to changing historical realities, "which may be adapted to address and reflect the ever-changing circumstances of life."[31] As to these contingent responses, framed as "temporal elements", the Manifesto further elaborates:

> Temporal elements within Islamic orthodoxy, on the other hand, constitute historically determined responses to specific circumstances on the part of Muslims. These responses may be described as the historical (or civilizational) manifestation of Islam, which occurred within specific territories at specific points in time, primarily within the Arab, Persian and Turkish cultural basins, often in response to armed conflict with neighboring states and the administration of conquered territories and peoples.[32]

In the face of historically contingent and continuously evolving societal norms, including the current transformation of the wider global order, a new *ijtihad* is thus needed, according to the Manifesto. Finally, referring to an essay of Abdurrrahman Wahid, entitled "God needs no Defense", the Manifesto states:

> Omnipotent, and existing as absolute and eternal Truth, nothing could possibly threaten God. And as *ar-Rahman* (the Merciful) and *ar-Rahim* (the Compassionate), God has no enemies. Those who claim to defend God, Islam or the Prophet are thus either deluding themselves, or manipulating religion for their own mundane and political purposes, as we witnessed in the carefully manufactured outrage that swept the Muslim world several years ago, claiming hundreds of lives, in response to cartoons published in Denmark. Those who presume to fully grasp God's will, and dare to impose their own limited understanding of this upon others, are essentially equating themselves with God, and unwittingly engaged in blasphemy.[33]

The Manifesto also refers to the role of Sufism in Islamic history and, particularly, in Indonesia. We may add to this the specific significance of the Sufi school of *wahdat al-wujūd*.[34]

6) The Second Global Unity Forum, held in October 2018 in Yogyakarta, issued the Nusantara Statement, declaring:

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31 Baytarrahma October 2018a, p. 22.

32 Baytarrahma October 2018a, p. 23.

33 Baytarrahma October 2018a, p. 33; cf. also Johnson and Taylor 2021. The title resonates with Abdurrahman Wahid's essay, with the volume containing various texts related to Humanitarian Islam.

34 Cf. the chapters by Faridzadeh and Hentschel in this volume.

> We call upon people of goodwill
> of every faith and nation
> to join in building a global consensus
> to prevent the political weaponization of Islam,
> whether by Muslims or non-Muslims,
> and to curtail the spread of communal hatred
> by fostering the emergence of
> a truly just and harmonious world order,
> founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignityof every human being.[35]

7) In January 2019 a conference was held at the Pondok Pesantren Raudlatut Thalibin to discuss the Nusantara Manifesto and the steps to be taken "towards [establishing] an Islamic jurisprudence suitable to our emerging global civilization."[36] The communiqué issued following the conference thus stressed the importance of a new *ijtihād* to create a new *fiqh*.

8) The decree, entitled Bahtsul Masa'il al-Diniyyah al-Maudluiyyah, promulgated at the National Conference of Nahdlatul Ulama (2019 Munas), at Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Huda al-Azhar in Banjar, West Java, which was held from 27 February–1 March 2019, marked an important moment in the effort to elaborate a new *fiqh*. In particular, the abolition of the category of infidel (*kāfir*) must be seen as a decisive break with traditional articulations of *fiqh*. The decree issues in this context declares:

> The status of non-Muslims within a nation state is that of citizens (*mūwāṭin*) who possess rights and responsibilities equal to those of the nation's other citizens. They do not belong to any of the categories of infidel (*kāfir*) which exist within classical Islamic law, i.e., *mu'āhad* (infidels who are subjects of a non-Muslim ruler, who has signed a currently-valid peace treaty with Muslims); *must'aman* (infidels visiting or living in an Islamic state, for purposes of trade, diplomacy, etc., whose safety is guaranteed by a Muslim ruler); *dhimmī* (infidels who have submitted to Islamic rule, dwell within the borders of an Islamic state, pay an annual head tax and are governed by specific elements of Islamic law); and *ḥarbī* (infidels engaged in war with Muslims, and who may be killed on sight). These four categories were conceived within a context in which state and religion were absolutely fused together. Differences of opinion, and of religion, can no longer justify hostility between one person and another.[37]

35 Baytarrahma October 2018b.

36 Baytarrahma January 2019.

37 Baytarrahma March 2019, p. 5. As footnote 1 of the document notes, "the The Bahtsul Masa'il is a division of Nahdlatul Ulama which addresses issues related to Islamic law that are of immediate and practical concern to Muslims. Members of the Bahtsul Masa'il are prominent 'ulamā' (religious scholars) whose knowledge and mastery of *fiqh* (Islamic law) qualifies them to issue authoritative rulings on such matters."

Fig. 1.1
"Stop calling other people infidels. The fact that someone is not Muslim doesn't make them an infidel."[38]

As to ongoing conflicts globally, the final sentence of the findings of the Bahtsul Masa'il states: "The position of Nahdlatul Ulama regarding armed conflict worldwide, therefore, is to struggle for peace rather than engage in conflict."[39]

The Bahtsul Masa'il decree must be read in the wider framework of the Humanitarian Islam movement's calls for a recontextualization and reform of a number of "problematic" tenets of the classical Islamic jurisprudential tradition.[40] A noteworthy articulation of this is a text entitled "The Recontextualization of Fiqh (Islamic Law) and Transformation of the Prevailing "Muslim Mindset," for the Sake of World Peace and to Achieve a Harmonious Communal Life for all Mankind," presented by Yahya Cholil Staquf, General Secretary of the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council, as part of the 2019 Munas.[41] The starting point of Staquf's elaborations in this document is the ISOMIL Declaration of 2016 and the so-called Abu Dhabi Document on Human Fraternity, a joint statement signed by Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad al-Tayeb of Al-Azhar, on 4 February 2019 in Abu Dhabi, UAE:

> Elaborating on the official position of Nahdlatul Ulama, previously stated in point eight of the *International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders* (*ISOMIL*) *Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration* – which was promulgated in Jakarta, Indonesia, on May 10, 2016 – Nahdlatul Ulama specifically wishes to emphasize the significance of a viewpoint [implicitly] expressed in the Abu Dhabi *Document on*

38 Meme created and widely distributed by NU followers in the wake of the 2019 Munas. See Baytarrahma October 2019.

39 Baytarrahma March 2019, p. 9.

40 Cf. Baytarrahma October 2019, which refers to "the long, systematic and institutional process, through which Nahdlatul Ulama spiritual leaders are moving to address obsolete and problematic tenets of Islamic orthodoxy often used to justify religious supremacism, hatred and violence."

41 Staquf 2015.

> *Human Fraternity*: viz., that the prevailing "Muslim mindset" contains certain views that foster conflict. These views are rooted in specific interpretations of Islamic teaching, which must change if we are to mobilize the Muslim world, to the maximum extent possible, behind efforts to foster world peace. This will entail "recontextualizing" a number of *fiqh* views that are no longer compatible with, nor reflect, the realities of the contemporary world.[42]

This is put in a historical framework:

> The dominant view expressed within the *fiqh* (Islamic legal) tradition, regarding these issues, arose within a specific historical context during the Middle Ages, and thus reflects the actual, structural [political, military and socio-cultural] realities facing human civilization during that era. We now live amidst [i.e., within the context of] a completely different civilizational reality, in which a number of fundamental changes have occurred since the emergence of Islamic law over a thousand years ago, within the context of the Middle East.[43]

The framework of the documents consists also of a specific Indonesian and NU framing:

> Kyai Haji Achmad Shiddiq – who was elected Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council at the 27th NU Congress (*Muktamar*) in Situbondo, East Java, in 1984 – created an historic document when he established an authoritative religious framework that explicitly affirmed human equality on the basis of: 1) the fraternity of Muslims (*ukhuwwah islamiyah*); 2) the fraternity of those who dwell within a single nation (*ukhuwwah wataniyah*); and 3) the fraternity of all human beings (*ukhuwwah insaniyah*, or *ukhuwwah basyariyah*).[44]

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42 Staquf 2015, p. 1.

43 Staquf 2015, p. 2.

44 Staquf 2015, p. 3.

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Defining Humanist Hermeneutics

Case Study – Humanitarian Islam

Alina Isac Alak

Abstract

The purpose of the present article is to succinctly explain the major determinations of what will be termed "humanist" Qur'anic hermeneutics and exemplify them by analyzing, as a case study, the hermeneutically and exegetically relevant fundamental principles of the movement of Humanitarian Islam. In the first part of the article, I define humanist hermeneutics and analyze some particularities of the humanist exegetical products. In the second part of the article, I analyze the *Nusantara Manifesto* document, briefly exploring how the concept of *raḥmah*, understood as universal love and compassion, is used as a main meta-textual ethical principle that precedes and transcends the Qur'an and guides the mechanism of plural textual interpretations. Additionally, I will emphasize progressive Islamic approaches such as epistemological fluidity, soteriological openness and religious pluralism, the direct disclosure of the agency and the role the interpreter plays in the process of the extraction of Qur'anic meanings.

Key Words

humanist hermeneutics, humanist Qur'anic interpretation, humanitarian Islam, Indonesia, Nusantara Manifesto

1 Introduction

The purpose of the present article is to succinctly explain the major characteristics and determinations of humanist Qur'anic hermeneutics and exemplify them by analyzing, as a case study, the hermeneutically and exegetically relevant fundamental principles of Humanitarian Islam, as it is currently developing in Indonesia. In the first part of the article, based on the intricate relation that exists between Islamic theories of revelation and hermeneutics, I will define humanist hermeneutics as a Qur'anic theory and methodology of interpretation that affirms the interference of the human factor and/or limitation

of human comprehension on the level of the source, of the process and of the product of the revelation itself, as well as on the level of the interpretation of the Text / Qur'an itself. Using Shahab Ahmed's conceptual distinctions regarding the nature of revelation, I will then analyze some particularities of the humanist exegetical products rooted in a humanist hermeneutics, focusing on their plural meta-textual epistemic and ontological communication with the Pre-Text, Context and other textual and/or non-textual products of revelation; their axiomatically open-ended interpretive and hermeneutical processes; and their antropocentric, explorative, dynamic, interactive, performative stance. In the second part of the article, I will analyze an essential document for Humanitarian Islam, namely the *Nusantara Manifesto*, identifying its humanist-compatible principles and hermeneutical strategies. For example, I will briefly explore how the proponents of Humanitarian Islam use *raḥmah*, which they identify as "universal love and compassion," as the main meta-textual ethical principle that precedes and transcends the Text / the Qur'an, and guides the mechanism of plural textual interpretations. Additionally, I will emphasize progressive Islamic approaches, such as epistemological fluidity, soteriological openness and religious pluralism, the direct disclosure of the agency and the role the interpreter plays in the process of the extraction of Qur'anic meanings. I hold that Humanitarian Islam movement presents important humanist tendencies and aspirations, as the ones specifically discussed here, but it also ignores – in its fundamental documents,[1] at least till now – essential humanist concerns, such as the internal inequity and persecution of Muslim women and of certain Muslim sects that do not conform to what was defined as Islamic orthodoxy, for instance, Ahmadiyya or Shi'a groups.

Methodologically, I will use the analytical and conceptual apparatus regarding the different and multiple spatial dimensions of Revelation developed by Shahab Ahmed in *What is Islam?*. Ahmed distinguishes between the Pre-Text, Text and Con-Text of the Revelation, defining the Pre-Text as the Revelatory Premise of the Universal Reality of the Unseen God, as the source of Revelation that remains ontologically prior to and alethically (regarding the Truth) larger than the Text of Revelation, namely the textual product of the Revelation – the Qur'an. The Text represents a limited expression of and contingent upon

1 Baytarrahmah: Pemuda Ansor. Declaration on Humanitarian Islam; Baytarrahmah: International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders (ISOMIL). Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration – Introduction to the Fundamental Principles of Nahdlatul Ulama (Mukaddimah Qanun Asasi) (1926).

the Truth of the Pre-Text.[2] Regarding the Text, Muslims agreed that the Qur'an does not exhaust the Truth of the Pre-Text, but they embraced different epistemological methodologies of accessing and knowing the Truth of the Pre-Text: without the Text, via the Text or only in the Text.[3] Finally, the Con-Text, as a product of prior hermeneutical engagement with Revelation, represents "that whole field or complex or vocabulary of meanings of Revelation that have been produced in the course of the human and historical hermeneutical engagement with Revelation, and which are thus already present as Islam".[4]

2 Defining the Humanist Hermeneutics and Humanist Qur'anic Interpretations

Using Ahmed's conceptual distinctions regarding revelation, I designate as "humanist hermeneutics"[5] any Qur'anic theory and methodology of interpretation that recognizes and asserts the inherent interference of the human factor and/or limitation of the human comprehension on – at least part – of the following levels:

1. *on the level of the source of the revelation itself* – asserting that: the knowledge of the Pre-Text cannot be confined to or exhausted by any of the products of the revelation / by any Text.
2. *on the level of the process of the revelation itself* – asserting: the human agency of the prophet Muhammad in the construction of the final product of revelation / the Qur'an; and/or the construction of the final product of the revelation / the Qur'an / the Text, be it conceived under the form of an oral discourse or a text, as a temporal reaction to or as an interactive dialogue with a specific historical community/society/culture that therefore leaves its imprint on the Text itself.
3. *on the level of the product of the revelation itself* – asserting, based on the prophetic human agency and/or the interaction with the 7th century Hijaz culture (see b.) in the construction of the final product of revelation itself, that the content of the Qur'an / the Text is ineluctably influenced by either the Prophet's personal understanding, feelings, experience, and/or its general historical context of revelation.

2 Ahmed 2016, pp. 346–347.
3 Ahmed 2016, p. 347.
4 Ahmed 2016, pp. 356–357.
5 A more detailed explanation is in Alina Isac Alak, forthcoming publication.

4. *on the level of the interpretation of the Text itself* – recognizing the decisive role of the interpreter and of the interpretative and hermeneutical methodologies in the process of the extraction of the Qur'anic meanings. In a humanist hermeneutics, the influence that the "prior text", particularly the historical, cultural, social, political, educational background of the exegete and his/her own inclinations, preferences, expectations, personal experiences, psychological configuration and, not less important, gender,[6] have on the process and the results of the interpretation itself, is disclosed.

If we focus on the humanist dimension of Islamic hermeneutics, as defined above, we can notice the existence of two main antagonistic hermeneutical paradigms, dependent on two different theories of revelation, that have impacted most visibly contemporary Muslim societies under the form of the heavily textualist Salafi Islam and the contextualist progressive Islam. Inevitably, between these two extremes there is a spectrum of multiple combinations of theories of revelation and hermeneutics that I do not approach here, due to length constraints of the article. Furthermore, humanist hermeneutics itself includes a large range of intra-differences and specificities, but it remains connected with the extended Islamic tradition.

Continuing the analysis from the perspective of the inextricable connection that exists between Qur'anic hermeneutics and theories of revelation,[7] I can briefly mention that the humanist exegetical products that can be attached to a humanist hermeneutics should be:

1. rooted in a humanist theory of revelation that does not freeze the epistemological authority solely in the Text, but it allows a fluid and plural meta-textual epistemic and ontological communication with the Pre-Text, Context and other non-textual or non-discursive products of revelation such as the Cosmos and self-reflexivity;[8]
2. constructed within an axiomatically, non-negotiable, continuous, open-ended hermeneutical finality (there is no ultimate authentic, singular, sacred interpretation, but a plurality of – openly assumed – human, constantly changing and contextually adapting interpretations);[9]
3. reflect a major paradigm shift from a paradoxically arrogant theo-centric, logo-centric, truth-obsessed, static, dualistic, politically framed (constructing relations of power and subordination between the text and

6 Barlas 2002, p. 25; Wadud 1999, pp. 2–5.

7 Andani 2020, p. 393; Vishanoff 2011, pp. 70–108. Akbar 2020, pp. 3 and 162.

8 Ahmed 2016, p. 348; Rustom 2012, pp. 42–43.

9 Sukidi 2009, p. 207.

the reader) exegesis to an anthropocentric, meta-textual, explorative, dynamic, interactive, performative exegesis. I will explain succintly these distinctions in the following sub-sections.[10]

2.1 *Text Fundamentalism and Its Hermeneutical Challenges*

Paradoxically, there is a widespread contemporary tendency to adopt essentialist textual perspectives, or, in Moosa's terms, text fundamentalism, namely to treat the Qur'an as a passive, sovereign, non-interactive text that simply delivers norms and holds absolute authority. In fact, asserts Moosa, the Qur'an represents a performative revelation that requires an interactive audience – the readers, listeners, speakers/"the community of the text" – that, along with history, are playing a decisive role in interpretation, creating and negotiating meanings in the textual process.[11] Text fundamentalism, generative of "hermeneutical acrobatics" is seductive not only for fundamentalist or neo-traditionalist Muslims, who preserve patriarchal and sometimes non-humanist interpretations through this strategy, but also for modernists,[12] including feminists such as Ali Ashgar Engineer, Azizah Al Hibri, Asma Barlas, Amina Wadud in her early writings,[13] who privilege some singular verses with a humanist and egalitarian content and treat them as authoritative and normative, ignoring other, problematic Qur'anic passages. Placing the burden of epistemological authority solely on the Text does not uproot the authoritarian readings of the Qur'an, it just substitutes the content of a presupposed exclusive, transparent, stable textual normativity with another arrogant normativity, without fundamentally contesting and shifting the epistemological paradigm that facilitates in the first place the confounding of human interpretations with divine intentions, be they, for instance, in relation to the gender dimension of this analysis, patriarchal and hierarchical, or humanist and egalitarian ones.

In more recent Muslim feminist writings, the tendency of engaging in a humanist hermeneutics, as defined here, becomes more obvious in the way the Text starts to lose its previous authoritarian epistemological grip. For instance, Wadud, in her later volume, *Inside the Gender Jihad. Women's Reform in Islam*, pleads for a radical "transcending of the text", for the right of saying "no" to the text – here punctually referring to Q 4:34 regarding wife beating – in the name of our honestly assumed contemporary ethical sensibilities[14] that dictate us

10 Forthcoming publication, Alina Isac Alak.
11 Moosa 2003, pp. 123–125.
12 Moosa 2003, p. 125.
13 Wadud 1999.
14 Wadud 2006, p. 191.

to see this act as being wrong, despite being seemingly supported by the Text. In the same manner, Kecia Ali places the imperative of justice above the Text, arguing, without entering into details regarding the theory of revelation, that the Qur'anic text is not a full reflection of divine reality, but only a pale shadow of it[15] and that "the Qur'anic text itself requires Muslims to sometimes depart from its literal provisions in order to establish justice".[16] Not coincidentally, Ali supports a continuous reinterpretation of the Text, responsive to the changes in interpreter's context and doubled by the awareness that the interpreter bears the responsibility for her/his human understanding and exegesis. This contemporary tendency, which may be equated with a denial of the Text, is not a rejection of revelation however. On the contrary, being against some seemingly inhumane meanings of the Text becomes a pious act that reconnects the Text to the Pre-text and revivifies a more sophisticated theory of revelation that takes into consideration the multi-spatiality of revelation as Pre-Text, Text and Con-Text, in order to escape the authoritarian trap of heavy textualist hermeneutics.

2.2 *Authoritarian Hermeneutics: Logo-centric, Truth-obsessed, Theo-centric, Politically-framed*

In a textualist, "political" interpretation of the Text there is a relation of power between the sovereign Text that possesses clear, decontextualized, superior, certain literal meanings that must be granted epistemological priority in the process of interpretation[17] because they reside "in totality in the mind of its Originator"[18] and the self-annihilating, objective, obedient interpreter of the Text. In this paradigm, the Qur'anic text is conceived as existing prior to its revelation and prior to history, in a metaphysical dimension, outside time and space;[19] the Qur'anic text, in this case, is attributed the undisputed power of speaking for itself, generating, inevitably, "a minimalist hermeneutics in which the interpreter suppresses textual ambiguities."[20] Aside from this, the interpreter is considered to have the objective capacity, mainly through philological analysis, to retrieve and discover the passive, self-evident, stable, fixed meaning of the Text and implicitly, the underlying divine authorial intent.[21] Hence the theo-centric label I attached to this type of hermeneutics.

15 Ali 2005, p. 134.
16 Ali 2005, p. 55.
17 Gleave 2012, pp. vii, 24, 195, 146.
18 Duderija 2011, p. 73.
19 Duderija 2011, pp. 71–72.
20 Sharify-Funk 2006, p. 67.
21 Duderija 2011, p. 73.

Moreover, in this type of textualist hermeneutics, the interpreter is supposedly able to avoid or diminish significantly his own subjectivity and transparently transmit, using an empirical methodology, the collected facts – textual proofs (*nass*) –,[22] in an "authoritarian hermeneutics" that "involves equating between the authorial intent and the reader's intent, and renders the textual intent and autonomy, at best, marginal".[23] Paradoxically, this simplistic Text idolatry that suffocates the communication with Pre-Text and a larger Con-Text nourished a form of "prescriptive authority" of the scholar to prescribe certain understandings, norms and practices to the other Muslims[24] that culminated in and legitimized authoritarian, despotic, inevitably human, Qur'anic interpretations.[25] The indicators of the Divine Will encapsulated in the Qur'an were treated as perfect embodiments of the full Divine Will in a process that eventually subdued and equated the Divine Will with the various, fallible, human understandings of that Divine Will.[26] The literalist reading of the Text, doubled by a blatant disconnection of the Text from the Pre-text, deemed irrelevant in the comprehension of the Text, facilitated such authoritarian hermeneutics.

2.3 *Anthropocentric Humanist Hermeneutics and Open Qur'anic Interpretations*

Defying the literalist suppositions explained above, the humanist hermeneutics engages, on a micro level, in a Qur'anic interpretation that recognizes the complex, dynamic and dialectic process that exists between the text, author (author's intent) and reader and his/her context in the process of the extraction of meanings.[27] These interpretative communities that form around the text and create common methodologies of deriving the meanings are not inventing the meaning of a text, but they are negotiating it and are negotiated by it in a specific historical context.[28] Moreover, as we have already emphasized, the interpretation of the text and the construction of meaning is influenced by the reader's personal psychology, life experiences, circumstances and educational, cultural background. The Text is recognized as offering only limited textual indicators and an incomplete authorial intent that is also "bounded by its audience, historical context, and language."[29] In other words, this means that

22 Mernissi 1991, pp. 127–128.
23 Abou El Fadl 1991, p. 5.
24 Ahmed 2016, p. 282.
25 Abou El Fadl 1991, p. 132.
26 Abou El Fadl 2001, pp. 128 and 67.
27 Abou El Fadl 2001, p. 120.
28 Abou El Fadl 2001, p. 123.
29 Abou El-Fadl 2001, p. 127.

the humanist hermeneutics, being predicated on the connection between the interpreter, interpreted and her/his present epistemic, experiential and social context is fundamentally an anthropocentric one that transfers axiomatically the interpretive responsibility to the human interpreter. Thus it avoids the danger of authoritarianism, of conflating the law with the moral imperative[30] such as in Salafi exegesis, of conflating the human exegesis with the non-historical and eternal, divine revelation[31] and the fallible, human interpretations of the law with the divine Will.

2.4 *Humanist Hermeneutics: Meta-Textual, Explorative, Interactive, Performative*

We have previously mentioned that a humanist hermeneutics evades the strictly textual, hierarchical subject-object binary mode of doing hermeneutics that is associated with extracting Qur'anic meanings based on some simplistic, literalist suppositions. Additionally, the question regarding the authenticity of interpretation is not answered logo-centrically by identifying stable, obvious, discursive, mono-semantic or even pluri-semantic truths exclusively in the Text, in the object, in a static "what" (what the Qur'an says), but it shifts to interrogating the dynamic transformation of the Self, of the subject, of the "who" (who is impacted, in a certain historical and personal experiential context, by the interaction with the performative Qur'an). More precisely, the humanist hermeneutics transfers the center of interest from an alethically-informed (discursive, textual truth-obsessed) approach of the Text to a transformative, explorative reading that engages the Self and is reflected in the understanding of the Text and Cosmos, including her/his own social human context. The Self is transferred at the center of the hermeneutical process that therefore intends "to invest [it] in the making of meaning … and concomitantly to invest or attach that truth and meaning in the making of one's Self."[32]

The explorative approach of the revelation is connected to a performative type of exegesis that allows the individual/the reader to be transformed by the interaction with Qur'an as a process of revelation that will further influence her/his reading of the Text. Within this hermeneutical paradigm centered on self-reflexivity and self-awareness, the Qur'an retains just an instrumental value of guiding humanity without offering final textual answers that require the reader's absolute obedience to exegetical text-centric knowledge, disconnected from the personal and social dynamics and reality. On the other hand, on a macro level, humanist hermeneutics engages in a meta-textual type of

30 Abou El-Fadl 2001, p. 269.
31 Barlas 2002, p. 53.
32 Ahmed 2016, p. 345.

applied interpretation of the Text that treats as the legitimate locus of knowledge and of the extraction of revelatory meanings not only the Text itself, but also the Cosmos and the Self as ontologically and epistemologically valid signs of the same Revelation.[33] Humanist hermeneutics facilitates a reading of the Text as a permanently open Text that fluidly communicates not only with the Pre-Text and other non-textual sources of knowledge, such as the Cosmos, leading to an ecological solidarity, or self-reflexivity, but also with other textual sources of knowledge (other religious revelations).[34] This perspective on revelation creates a different relation with alterity and has strong soteriological consequences, leading to a religious pluralism.

In conclusion, humanist hermeneutics does not negate the existence of a higher truth, but it does not limit it to particular textual discursive truths. Instead, it shifts interest to the anthropological dimension and the interiority and transformative interactions of the Self with Text, Pre-Text and Cosmos.

3 Case Study – Indonesian Humanitarian Islam

In this last section of the article I will analyze one important document that enunciates the founding principles involved in the construction of the Indonesian movement of Humanitarian Islam (*al-Islām li-l-Insānīyah*) and, indirectly, of a "humanitarian"[35] type of Qur'anic interpretation: the *Nusantara Manifesto*.[36] The *Nusantara Manifesto* was adopted and promulgated by Gerakan Pemuda Ansor, the Nahdlatul Ulama young adults movement, and Bayt ar-Rahmah in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, on October 25, 2018. As defined on the official home page of the Bayt ar-Rahmah organization,

> Humanitarian Islam is a global movement that seeks to restore *raḥmah* (universal love and compassion) to its rightful place as the primary message of Islam, by addressing obsolete and problematic elements within Islamic orthodoxy that lend themselves to tyranny, while positioning these efforts within a much broader initiative to reject any and all forms of tyranny, and foster the emergence of a global civilization endowed with nobility of character.[37]

33 See also, beside Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy, Ibn Sina 1963, pp. 114–115.

34 See the religious pluralism and soteriological openness present in Muslim Philosophers, Sufi, Ismaili and contemporary contextualist hermeneutics, including Indonesian Humanitarian Islam project.

35 "Humanitarian" is a denomination chosen by the proponents of Indonesian Humanitarian Islam, but whose meanings are in a significant part consonant with the definition of "humanist" hereby presented.

36 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto.

37 Baytarrahmah: Humanitarian Islam.

The Indonesian movement for Humanitarian Islam is constructed as a doctrinal but also socio-political response to a triple threat: a specific political one, namely the local extremists groups that reject the existence of Indonesia as a multi-religious and pluralistic nation state, despite its long tolerant autochthone tradition; a religious fundamentalist one: the same groups that simultaneously fight for imposing the only authentic interpretation and practice of Islam – theirs; and the indirect threat created by the absence of a firm, well-articulated response on behalf of the majority of the population against the previous mentioned threats.[38] The scholastic, theoretical solution to this theological extremism involves mainly, as we will see, the reconstruction of jurisprudence in a manner that allows it to offer an adequate, efficient response to the problems of contemporary society, following the model of classical jurisprudence the products of which were themselves the result of the dynamic interaction with a specific social context. From the beginning, it is important to remark that the adepts of Humanitarian Islam are interested in identifying and working with the root and the subtle causes of extremism, not only with its socio-political determinations.

The proponents of Humanitarian Islam themselves associate the origin of their movement not with a modern phenomenon, but with *Wali Songo* ("Nine Saints") Java's 15th/16th century movement that promoted a contextualized form of Islamic teachings, *Islam Nusantara* ("East Indies Islam"), as a model of multi- and inter-cultural harmony, rooted in the same value of *raḥmah* – compassion. Explicitly emphasized in the presentation of Humanitarian Islam is its hermeneutical practice regarding the contextualization of Islamic teachings that, in order to be relevant, must reflect the inherently constant changes of social reality and human understanding. Soteriologically, this means that Islam becomes axiomatically just "one of many paths through which humans may attain spiritual perfection."[39] We can already notice in the introduction of the *Manifesto* that Humanitarian Islam validates other ways of knowledge that access the Pre-Text, such as the "civilizational wisdom" of Nusantara / the Malay Archipelago, appreciating the ethical and social praxis of former religious understandings, namely the "social harmony and peaceful co-existence among and between those of widely varying ethnicities, cultures and faiths co-existence."[40] The humanist perspective is supported not only through Islamic principles, but also through the local historical, concrete, plural civilizational existence and experience.

38 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 5.
39 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 5.
40 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 7.

3.1 *Compassion as a Hermeneutical Decoder of the Text and Epistemological Fluidity*

The document starts with the following front-page declaration:

> A call to people of goodwill of every faith and nation to join in building a global consensus to prevent the political weaponization of Islam, whether by Muslims or non-Muslims, and to curtail the spread of communal hatred by fostering the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order, founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being. #LetUsChooseCompassion.[41]

The main message, centred on preventing the political use of Islam and the spreading of hate, ends with an emphasis on an inter-relational, attitudinal and behavioural value: compassion / *raḥmah*. If compassion is/can be a choice, this implies indirectly that the supporters of Humanitarian Islam recognize a multiplicity of interpretative possibilities and the agency of the interpreter. Compassion becomes the main meta-textual ethical principle that precedes and transcends the Text, here the Qur'an, and guides the process of textual interpretation. Moral humanist values are axiomatic and (pre)determine choosing the best meanings in the interpretation. Constantly in the *Manifesto*, compassion is promoted as the essential connecting value that forms bridges between different cultures and religions.[42] Basically, the proponents of Humanitarian Islam are trying to find a common language that it is supported by the Text, but extends from a textual truth to a practical, humanist universal attitude. Compassion is the higher Truth through which they think they should interpret the textual truths; it is not a plain discursive truth, because it is inextricably associated with a praxis of kindness. Furthermore, compassion is a behavioral axiom grounded in an open acknowledgement of human unity. It is the pre-existent "good"/*al-maʿruf* recognized in the Qur'an that was not initiated or invented by the Qur'anic revelation, but that preceded it and imbued all other, previous revelations and human nature itself. We can observe here the influence of Sufi ethics and its view on revelation.[43]

In order to support these ideas, the *Nusantara Manifesto* continues with a series of quotes not only from Qur'an, collections of Sunni *ahadith*, writings of a well-known Sunni Egyptian scholar and a respected Indonesian one, but also from the Old and New Testament, as well as from Indonesian traditional proverbs. Later in the *Manifesto* quotes from different religious and

41 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 1.

42 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 7: "Compassion as a universal value, common to all religions and peoples."

43 Rustom 2012, pp. 23–24.

philosophical traditions are also invoked, for example assertions attributed to Sri Ramakrishna, Milarepa, Cicero, John Adams, or sayings from Ramayana, Dhammapada, Tao Te Ching and Sutasoma.[44] On the theme of religious extremism, Dr. Prof. Rüdiger Lohlker, a contemporary non-Muslim scholar and expert in extremist Islamic thought, is also quoted.[45] Accepting diverse epistemological authorities, not necessarily only formal religious ones, is an expression of the epistemological fluidity that defines Humanitarian Islam. Quoting equally from various systems of ideas proves an epistemological deprovincialisation that leads to ecumenism or religious pluralism and soteriological openness. This is another mark of humanist hermeneutics, as explained above, that confirms that, in the view of Humanitarian Islam, the knowledge of the Pretext is not limited to the knowledge of the Qur'anic Text. On the other hand, eulogizing the epistemological permeability is explicitly connected to the past, because the "greatness of classical Islamic civilization – which incorporated a humane and cosmopolitan universalism – stemmed largely from the intellectual and spiritual maturity that grew from the amalgamation of Arab, Greek, Jewish, Christian and Persian influences."[46]

The content of the quotes presented in the *Manifesto* emphasizes the message of human "unity in diversity" and gravitates around the themes of love, compassion and the importance of the spiritual state of the interpreter, more precisely of the nobility of her/his heart and/or soul in understanding the prescriptions of their religious tradition. The quotes, in their variety, do not constitute so much a textual pleading in favor of a stable, discursive, punctual truth, but rather state an existential transformative stance regarding the role of religion and, simultaneously, of the interpreter. Moral praxis is presented as a hermeneutical principle and a decoder of the Text and truth. Moreover, knowledge is not perceived as being strictly discursive and textual, but it includes a holistic dimension that explores the "heart" as the locus and symbol of a transcendental cognitive operator in various religious traditions. If rooted in the proper instance of knowledge, the practice of religion as *raḥmah* ("universal love and compassion") can become "a source of unity and strength within diversity", a source of harmony transposed in equal rights and respect for the dignity of each human being, rather than the cause for social and polarization, division, hatred, supremacy and violence.[47]

44 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, pp. 19–21.
45 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 15.
46 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 32.
47 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, pp. 4–5.

It is important to mention here that violence and hatred against those perceived as non-Muslims is specifically enunciated and rejected in *Nusantara Manifesto*, but the internal discrimination and/or violence against Muslim women themselves, LGBTQ+ people or against other Muslim groups such as Ahmadiyya or Shi'a is not a subject explicitly tackled with.[48] The gender dimension of Humanitarian Islam's critique of classical jurisprudence is unfortunately missing, despite being a key element in humanist Islamic approaches. Ignoring – at least for the moment and in the present documents – this essential field that necessitates reformation in Islamic jurisprudence (the status of Muslim women and the relation with other Muslim sects that were historically persecuted), forces us to identify Humanitarian Islam movement as having important humanist intentions and tendencies but still needing to extend its quest for social justice and religious pluralism. It is ironic that, despite the blatant absence of any reference to the status of Muslim women, the fundamental concept that supports all humanist argumentation in the *Manifesto* is *raḥmah*, compassion, traditionally associated with a feminine quality and ability. The first gender reference in the *Nusantara Manifesto* is generated by an explanation of this term, *raḥmah*, "derived from the same triconsonantal root (*r-ḥ-m*) as *al-Raḥmān* and *al-Raḥīm*, two of the ninety-nine names of God. All three words imply the loving safety of a mother's womb."[49]

3.2 *Defining Religion – Anthropological, Holistic, Ethical Perspective*

In the *Manifesto*, the definition of religion is rather anthropologically than theologically centered; the emphasis lies not on the divinity, but on the ways the human being and society are served and perfected by religion: "religion should serve as a blessing for all creation (*raḥmatan lil-ʿĀlamīn*) and a source of universal love and compassion – flexible and responsive to the needs of humanity in every time and place."[50] Furthermore, religion is not conceived and judged according to a set of transparent, punctual, declarative assertions, but in relation to its humanist, practical impact. Religious understanding is connected to the ontological state of the interpreter, her/his state of being / *fiṭrah*, not to his/her discursive knowledge. *Fiṭrah* becomes a precondition of the correct Qur'anic interpretation: religion "seeks to restore human nature to what Islam regards as its pure and original state (*fiṭrah*) – as symbolized by the

48 Even if "sectarian hatred, supremacism and violence" are denounced in other documents. For example, Baytarrahmah: Pimpinan Pusat. Gerakan Pemuda Ansor. Declaration on Humanitarian Islam, p. 19.

49 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 14.

50 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 12.

act of God breathing life into the Prophet Adam."[51] From a more pragmatic perspective, *fiṭrah* becomes a key social concept defined in opposition to tyranny, to the domination of others.[52] More precisely, *fiṭrah* is associated with an inter-relational and social praxis based on harmony, justice, equality and self-discipline, while tyranny is dependent on exercising power in order to control other human beings.

We must draw attention to the fact that the whole argumentation presented in the manifesto, regarding the nature of religion, is not Text-based, but rather psychologically and spiritually oriented, working with suppositions that transcend the Text. The influence of Sufi metaphysics and cosmic anthropology is obvious here: acceding to the state of *fiṭrah* requires an individual effort / *jihād* to remain in a "state of self-transcendent awareness of, and devotion to, God (i.e., the state of *islām*)".[53] The definition of God has also epistemological and hermeneutical implications: "*Al-Ḥaqq* (the Truth) is one of the 99 names of God. To serve the truth is to serve God".[54] Not surprisingly, in Humanitarian Islam submission to God is not connected to a textual blind obedience and to the subjection of reason to the literalism of the Text, like, for example, in Salafism, but to an individual's own consciousness and interiority. Explicitly defining "Truth" as a name, an attribute of God, and not as an identifiable text is a recurrence of the same recognition of the gnoseological role of the Pretext: God and knowledge extend beyond the Text.

In addition, human knowledge and awareness rooted in *fiṭrah* is the source of "noble character (*al-akhlāq al-karīmah*) [that] manifests in the form of *tawāḍu'* (humility); *raḥmah* (universal love and compassion); *shukūr* (gratitude); *al-nīah al-ṣāliḥah* (virtuous intent)".[55] We remark here again that Humanitarian Islam proposes a holistic view of the human and truth that exceeds the discursive limits of a particular Text-focused tradition and expands into a sphere that comprises the whole human being. Knowledge is not simply conformity with a Text, but action, behaviour, goodness, compassion. The axiological value of the truth depends on its practical socio-ethical determinations. Even the main role of the prophet Muhammad, the perfect human embodiment of compassion, is related to presenting Muslims a moral behavior[56] that departs from the contemporary obsession with laws and textual obedience. This ethical discourse of Humanitarian Islam is what ensures its

51 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 13.
52 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 13.
53 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 14.
54 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 14.
55 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 14.
56 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 14.

soteriological openness and proclaimed unity with other religions.[57] Religious pluralism is based in the *Manifesto* on individual attitudes that involve the heart as an instance of knowledge and not the accumulation of textual proofs. Speaking of inner states, heart, "purification of the soul", "illumination", individual responsibility,[58] the connection between the state of the interpreter and the interpretation, adepts of Humanitarian Islam celebrate an inward centered Sufi perspective that is not seduced by the externalization of evil and demonization of otherness.

Of course, it remains to be further observed and analyzed the awkward neglect of the internal religious tensions regarding the relation between Sunni and other people that belong to different confessions (Shiʿa, Ahmadiyya) or assume a different gender and sexual orientation. It is not clear yet if these cases are seen as being included in the larger benevolent understanding of religious alterity and therefore not explicitly approached, or are temporarily put in the brackets because of their sensitive history. In this context, before ending this very succinct analysis of the nature of religion in the *Nusantara Manifesto*, we must indicate an thorny sectarian description added to the ideological definition of Humanitarian Islam as being based on the "teachings of *ahl al-sunnah wa-al-jamāʿah* (Sunni Islam)."[59] Such a specific, historically and semantically loaded reference may reinforce the premise of a doctrinal polarization between Sunni and Shia Islam, for example, and it may be perceived as creating a dissonance with the general message of the *Manifesto*.

3.3 *The Reconstruction of Fiqh and Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah*

Methodologically, as mentioned above, a major purpose of the Humanitarian Islam movement consists in the recontextualization of orthodox, authoritative Islamic law / *fiqh* that is considered to be separated from actual *sharīʿah* / "Divine Guidance". This is a useful terminological and conceptual distinction whose significance was re-emphasized recently in contemporary humanist, progressive Muslim thought: *sharīʿah* is defined as the Will of Allah, an abstract moral concept that refers to a transcendental ideal of an infallible, eternal, universal, sacred law characterised by justice, while *fiqh* is the fallible product of the dynamic, mundane, inherently contingent and contestable human effort of understanding and concretely implementing this Will of God.[60] The proponents of Humanitarian Islam use these definitions to legitimize criticizing

57 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 15

58 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 19.

59 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 14.

60 See more in Mir-Hosseini 2009, pp. 23–55; Abou El Fadl 2001, pp. 32–34; Ali 2003, p. 167.

the authoritarian *fiqh* that is unable to adapt and respond to contemporary social conditions, context and knowledge, because it conflates "man-made law with its revelatory inspiration, and … thereby elevate the products of human understanding – which are necessarily conditioned by space and time – to the status of Divine."[61]

Nowadays, the *Nusantara Manifesto* argues, *fiqh* contains problematic and anachronic jurisprudential tenets that were constructed in the medieval period to serve the interests of the theology of the empire that was inherently founded on the supposition of a permanent conflict with non-Muslims. This classical jurisprudence is also considered to be responsible for allowing different Islamist extremist groups to exploit its conflictual and discriminatory stance by maintaining, for example, obsolete, historical practices such as "offensive *jihād*, slavery, the subordination of infidels, stoning adulterers, executing homosexuals and amputating the hands of thieves."[62] "Islamic orthodoxy", specify the adepts of Humanitarian Islam, created in war times and currently resistant to processing and adapting to the recent social changes, is directly subjected to an uncomfortable critique in relation to the emergence of contemporary terrorism.[63] If classical Islamic jurisprudence constructed its view and attitude towards alterity in the context of the development of a theology of empire, infused by political elements and a hierarchical, hostile type of socialization, in present-day societies the socio-political, economic, cultural circumstances have radically changed. Rendering a set of contingent, historical laws invalid should become thus a just and logical consequence of a well-adapted and functional Islamic jurisprudence.[64] Contrary to universal religious norms, contingent religious norms and laws must and can be changed and adjusted to contemporary realities and necessities.

Henceforth, a traditionally accepted juridical concept used to justify legal change, namely *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, also exploited by progressive Muslim thinkers,[65] is brought into discussion. The principles of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, the objectives and purposes of the Islamic law, are meant to ensure the spiritual and material well-being of humanity. Nevertheless, their expression is dependent on the changes that manifest in a particular social context. Applying medieval tenets in the contemporary period contradicts the very objectives of *sharīʿah / maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*. In this context, the adherents of Humanitarian

61 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 31.
62 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 24.
63 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 27.
64 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 38.
65 Duderija, Contemporary Muslim Reformist Thought, pp. 1–11.

Islam consider that living in an era when the dichotomy of "us *versus* them" is not functional anymore, Muslims must start legislating while taking into consideration the social good of all individuals[66] and prevention of the expansion of extremist religious ideologies.

The existence of extremist groups is not only a military and political problem, but also a religious one, as long as it is based on the confounding of historical embedded jurisprudential human interpretations with divine laws and authority.[67] That is why the supporters of Humanitarian Islam try to dismantle the association of textual knowledge with clear divine orders and reconstruct the jurisprudential analysis, focusing on the interpreter's subjectivity and hermeneutical and ethical choices.[68] However, this does not mean that the reconstruction of *fiqh* is mandatory exclusively from a scholastic perspective; its social impact is assessed in Humanitarian Islam. For instance, the *Nusantara Manifesto* recurrently emphasizes how a decontextualized reproduction of medieval laws and rules in the contemporary period has a nocive impact on individual and society. The following stringent problematic fields gravitating around the theme of social and political instability, religious violence and extremism, are identified:

> Normative practices governing relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, including the rights, responsibilities and role of non-Muslims who live in Muslim-majority societies, and vice versa; Relations between the Muslim and non-Muslim world, including the proper aims and conduct of warfare; The existence of modern nation states and their validity – or lack thereof – as political systems that govern the lives of Muslims; and State constitutions and statutory laws/legal systems that emerged from modern political processes, and their relationship to *sharīʿah*.[69]

In addressing these socio-political problems, the adepts of Humanitarian Islam de-radicalize the concept of religion in relation to its historical contextualization: religion itself is not considered to be sacred or fixed. On the contrary, religion is often historically and rhetorically instrumentalized, according to human interests, for political and social purposes that divide humanity.[70] Identifying the "spiritual essence of religion" is an indispensable strategy of combating religious extremism, because what can be manipulated and weaponized

66 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 38.
67 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 4.
68 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 14.
69 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 6.
70 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 15.

is only the dogmatic, formal aspect of religion.[71] Humanitarian Islam recognizes the distinction between the literal textual meaning and the deeper purpose of this meaning, in the spirit of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* and *maqāṣidi tafsīr*.[72] It is this hermeneutical strategy that helps Humanitarian Islam to become immune to textual fundamentalism and literalism, or so the argument goes. It comes as no surprise that the adherents of Humanitarian Islam correlate their argumentation to an ethical perspective, asserting that Muslims must not be textually obsessed and grounding their religious understanding, including their understanding of alterity, in universal moral principles that help restore unity in humanity and fight tyranny, in all its manifestations, not only those expressed in an Islamic idiom. The widespread dichotomy between ideals and practice can be resolved, in this view, if Muslims transform moral practice into a criterion of a correct Islamic understanding.

3.4 *The Explorative, Performative, Subjective Exegesis and the Soteriological Pluralism*

In *Nusantara Manifesto* the fundament of the process of recontextualizing circumstantial Islamic rules and laws consists of humanist values, principles and a worldview that essentially relate to "*raḥmah* (universal love and compassion) and other manifestations of noble character (*al-akhlāq al-karīmah*)".[73] *Raḥmah* and "noble character" are non-textual principles that facilitate a different way of accessing the truth beyond the Text and the discursive form of knowledge based on it. The proponents of Humanitarian Islam do sometimes bring textual proofs, as mentioned above, quite diverse and not confined exclusively to the Islamic tradition, but they constantly emphasize that understanding religion does not depend only on correctly deciphering a text, but more importantly on a soul/character that has to be refined morally in order to perceive the truth. Here we encounter another element of humanist hermeneutics, discussed above: understanding Islam – and implicitly the Qur'an – is not just a matter pertaining to a scholastic enterprise, but a moral, transformative one. This new paradigm of engaging in textual interpretation allows the adherents of Humanitarian Islam not to slip into textual fundamentalism and to explicitly recognize the role of the interpreter in the process of the extraction of (Qur'anic) meanings: "… because God's creatures exist within time and space, their perceptions of truth and reality differ from one to the next, conditioned by their personal knowledge and experience"; "The spiritual

71 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 18.

72 For more details see Wijaya/Shofiyullah 2021, pp. 449–478.

73 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 7.

aptitude of any given individual necessarily plays a key role in his or her ability to attain the Truth, while the particular expression of Truth apprehended by one person may differ from that of the next".[74] Through this type of assertions, Humanitarian Islam openly recognizes the interdependency between knowledge and individual subjectivity and the reciprocal, dynamic influence and negotiated communication that exists between the subject and the object of analysis. Applying a holistic perspective regarding knowledge, Humanitarian Islam moves beyond the dichotomy "Text – human behaviour;" the text is not passive, but interacts with the interpreter, and it is expected that the interpreter lets himself/herself be shaped by the text and reacts accordingly.

This view on the plurality, subjectivity and fallibility of religious interpretation leads H.E. Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid, quoted extensively in the *Nusantara Manifesto*, to construct an Islamic eulogy for the freedom of expression.[75] In the spirit of contemporary progressive Muslims who argue in favor of a fundamental compatibility between core Islamic values and Western, human-rights centered ideals,[76] Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid connects Sufi epistemology to the issue of religious freedom. He argues that, if we take into consideration the Qur'anic definition of God as "the Truth" and if Truth cannot be known through emotion or intellectual concepts, but only through direct personal experience that it is associated with a process of self-transcendence/ego-annihilation, then the search for Truth itself / "*ḥaqq al-ḥaqīqī*", for God, must by necessity remain a free process.[77] Privileging non-discursive, direct knowledge of the divine, unmediated by the Text, or, in other terms, access to the Pretext, is again obvious in Humanitarian Islam's advancement of the freedom of thought. Freedom of thought, religious freedom and freedom in general is here a corollary of its Sufi-inspired epistemological stance. Human diversity, including the religious diversity, is justified ontologically and teleologically as a means to prevent authoritarianism; religious uniformity and conformity is not existentially possible. Religious pluralism is not an obstacle to accessing the Truth, but a manifestation of its realness. On a pragmatic, social level, freedom of thought is beneficial for Muslims themselves: because there is no monolithic voice of Islam, the expression of alternative Islamic understandings and critiques helps representing the multiplicity of Islamic perspectives

74 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 33.
75 Wahid 2011, p. 35.
76 Duderija 2012, pp. 99–121.
77 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 33.

and dismantling fundamentalism that equates any critique of its own interpretation of religion with an attack on religion *per se*.[78]

Before ending this presentation of the hermeneutically relevant principles of Humanitarian Islam, as derived from the *Nusantara Manifesto*, a few comments regarding some of its peculiar aspects are in order. Humanitarian Islam is, as we have seen, constructed as a doctrinal and social reaction to a politically expressed religious intolerance and fundamentalism. However, because religious extremism and terrorism are not only an Indonesian problem, but a global one that has encompassed the whole Muslim world, the solution should be a unifying one that involves the participation of all Muslim scholars. It is therefore only logical that, stemming from its focus on human unity and solidarity, Humanitarian Islam aspires to become a global movement exceeding the limits of its local Indonesian context.[79] Another specificity of Humanitarian Islam is that its proponents are openly associated with a political party and support a political agenda that envisions a democratic, inclusive and multi-cultural Indonesia.[80] Furthermore, essential is to notice that the effort of reforming Islamic jurisprudence and thought is an official, systematic and institutional one, involving state *'ulamā'* in the process[81] and not just isolated Muslim thinkers, as in the general progressive Muslim contemporary orientation.

Nevertheless, the question of whether Humanitarian Islam's supporters' views and attitude towards jurisprudential reform is methodologically radical – one that challenges the fundamentals of classical *fiqh* and its instruments – or only a corrective one, is not clear from the text of the *Nusantara Manifesto*. The approach of the classical Islamic tradition in general is, at least in *Nusantara Manifesto* and the other fundamental documents consulted,[82] quite ambivalent, sometimes reductionist and certainly insufficiently explained.[83] On the one hand, isolated, non-systematic, sometimes politically imposed "corrections" of Islamic jurisprudence are criticized as being inefficient and not tackling the root of the problem.[84] On the other hand, the positive aspects of classical jurisprudence, such as its epistemological openness, adaptability and sophistication, are eulogized. After five centuries of the supposed "freezing"

78 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 34.
79 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, pp. 37–38.
80 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 11.
81 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 22.
82 See footnote 1.
83 This is a topic that deserves further investigations that exceed the limits of this article.
84 Baytarrahmah: The Nusantara Manifesto, p. 28.

of *ijtihād* / independent legal reasoning,[85] Humanitarian Islam's adherents find it reasonable to invoke the responsive and adaptive nature of traditional jurisprudence – adaptive to evolving and changing social reality – as a legitimation and incentive for new generations of Muslims to revive this model. However, the problematic, often discriminatory fundamental methodological principles and premises of *uṣūl al-fiqh*,[86] not just their concrete historical results, such as verdicts and opinions, are ignored.

4 Conclusion

A humanist hermeneutics engages in a vertical epistemology that recognizes and accepts different forms of expressing the truth of the Pre-Text and the axiological importance that the Pre-Text and other, different textual and non-textual, non-discursive ways of accessing it continues to have in the interpretation of the Text, here the Qur'an. As we have seen, a humanist Qur'anic hermeneutics thus also generates humanist "quantifiable", socio-political interpretive results. The Qur'anic verses that are of a socio-legal nature are not to be applied literally in all epochs and in all types of human societies, irrespective of historical contexts. When the exegesis of socio-legal Qur'anic content is treated as a human, thus contestable, reformable, permanently open, explorative interpretation, subordinated to the ethical dimension of the Qur'an, a larger range of humanist Qur'anic understandings, centered on values such as human rights, gender egalitarianism and social justice, emerge. In addition to its beneficial socio-political impact, such humanist hermeneutics also has a theological impact, being able to support religious pluralism, even on a soteriological level.

Aspiring to participate in a humanist paradigm, despite its selective focus on some specific social problems (countering religious extremism, terrorism, anti-democratic views, etc) and the neglection of others (Muslim women status, LGBTQ+ rights, historically discriminated Islamic confessions such as Ahmadiyya or Shi'a), Humanitarian Islam, at least as defined in its main documents, seems not to be rooted in a text-centric perspective, but in an anthropocentric, morally and socially concerned one. Religion is not confined to the Text, but defined in a broader manner that includes other discursive

85 Closing of the gates of ijtihād is a debatable issue, but adepts of humanitarian Islam assume this premise.

86 See, for example, the discussions related to the marriage contract in Islam: Ali 2010, p. 50. Mir-Hosseini 2003, p. 6.

and non-discursive elements that relate to the Pre-Text such as compassion / *raḥmah*. *Raḥmah* operates as an essential meta-textual ethical principle that, while it takes precedence and transcends the Text / Qur'an, it also regulates the process of textual interpretation by choosing the best meanings in the midst of a multiplicity of interpretations and constructs universal bridges between different individuals, cultures and religions.

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Humanitarian Islam, the State, Fundamental Rights and the Free Democratic State

Hüseyin I. Çiçek

Abstract

Today's religious-ideological pluralism in Germany has a long and challenging history to show. Many different developments have led to the existence of a legal system that guarantees the religious and individual rights of citizens. The idea of Humanitarian Islam could possibly lead to new discussions with regard to Islamic law and state and possibly initiate developments that lead to religious-ideological pluralism. This article attempts to embed the ideas of Humanitarian Islam in the context of the liberal democratic state and to demonstrate the added value for politics and society.

Key Words

Humanitarin Islam, State, fundamental rights, Islam, free democratic state

1 Introduction

The liberal democratic constitutional state, as it is found in Germany and other countries in Western Europe, is repeatedly in the focus of political discussions that ask about the degree to which the legal system of such states is religiously influenced and, in some cases, calls for stronger emphasis on Christian content.[1] Discussions about social "decadence," questions of human medicine, and more also occur again and again. Religion plays an important role in all these debates because, to take just one example, opponents of modern biomedicine base their arguments on religious grounds. Groups who want government and state institutions to be more "religious" or Christian argue that the various aspects of social, political and economic life should fall in line with "Christian" teachings to greater extent. Just as in other Religions of course one problem is that Christian teachings are by no means homogenous; however, there is a

1 See Kreß 2012.

wide variety of interpretations of what "Christian" content of given social or political policies would or entail.

These questions are by no means new, nor are they due to recent migration or growing Muslim populations in Europe, as certain discourses want to have us believe. Rather, these discussions are an expression of political convictions that consider the necessity of a certain "transcendent" entity to be inescapable. In other words, the goal of those representing such positions is to reach a "state of salvation" for the population through a stronger connection to certain religious content. This will slowly but surely make the secular order of the contemporary liberal, democratic state, obsolete.

The historical experiences and traditions of Europe are repeatedly referred to in this context. Taking Germany as an example, this discourse often recurs with regard to the so-called Böckenförde dictum, among others. The conviction behind it is, that the modern state lives on "preconditions that it cannot fulfill itself."[2] Without mentioning Böckenförde, the AKP government in Turkey, which has been in power since 2002, holds the same beliefs as those who follow the Böckenförde dictum. According to them, the state or the constitution, etc., does not have legitimacy without religious reference. Erdogan and his party, the AKP, have tried to raise and educate a pious and religious society reminiscent of similar historical processes in European countries, with the same lack of success.[3] Instead, criticism of the government increases daily, and social discontent and communal polarization in Turkey apparently know no boundaries.

This article attempts to link the historical developments that have turned Germany into a state open to religion with the concept of Humanitarian Islam. The literature on the German democratic-liberal state is almost impossible to survey to its full content, and it is not the author's intention to reproduce it comprehensively here. The recipients of this article may forgive this. Rather, particular works are mentioned and discussed in representation of the many existing publications. With regard to Humanitarian Islam, the author relies on the articles of the Viennese Islamic scholar Rüdiger Lohlker. Likewise, the concept of Humanitarian Islam is brought to bear on the very different context of developments in Turkey. This is to contrast the various ways in which particular religious concepts and institutions might play a role in contemporary politics. The Turkish religious authorities and the current government under President Erdoğan have contributed to a polarization of social and political life

2 See Böckenförde 2006, passim.

3 See Dreßler, "Erdoğan und die "Fromme Generation"."

in Turkey through their strongly Islamic-tinged policies, which are increasingly dividing the country.

2 Secularization in Germany: a Compact Inventory

In the following section of this article, the interplay of religion, church and state in German history will be illuminated in a compact form. The aim is to show that secularization, the separation of church and state, by no means prevents a state open to religion – as seen in Germany. Religious content, symbols, and values do not disappear from public life and the danger of political and religious utopias – so-called "doctrines of salvation," regardless of their coloration – can probably be countered more efficiently. It is the author's conviction, that the followers of Humanitarian Islam want to avoid similar political and religious dead ends with their concept in order to contribute to greater social harmony.

The effectiveness of the modern state[4] is limited to this-worldly affairs. It is not one of the tasks of the state to take care of the salvation of the people's souls. The withdrawal of state power from religious responsibility was precisely the prerequisite for the sovereign state to end the confessional civil wars of the 16th and 17th centuries. Only when the state left the religious question of truth to the private sphere and confined itself to its role as a force for peace and order, was it possible to defuse the potential for religious civil war. The omnipotence of the modern state is thus sectoral; private religious questions are excluded.

The process of the separation of politics and religion, of state and church, is called secularization. Secularization means the process of separation of the political and the state from a given, religiously determined order. It becomes mundane, secular. This process is accompanied by the emergence of the modern and thus sovereign state. One is the obverse of the other. The state was able to establish itself as a sovereign power because it refrained from religious activity.

This separation of state and religion at the same time meant, that the government could no longer and would no longer invoke religion for its legitimation. In the German Empire, this was still different. Thus, the first sentence of the preamble to the Law Concerning the Constitution of the German Reich (of 1870/71) reads as follows: "We, Wilhelm, by the Grace of God German Emperor, King of Prussia, hereby decree in the name of the German Reich, after the

4 The following remarks are based on Kreß 2012, and the literature cited therein.

consent of the Bundesrat and the Reichstag has been given, what follows: …"[5] This formula was in use in Germany until just over 80 years ago.

The secularization of the state, or its separation from church and religion, has prevailed in a protracted process against the resistance of the Christian church. Despite the resistance, however, it is inherent in the history of Christianity. To some extent, European Christianity has always been in tension with the state. The Bible already says: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." (Matt. 22:21).

This changed with the Investiture Controversy (ca. 1050 to 1122, Worms Concordat). The main issue was, whether the Holy Roman Emperor had the right to appoint bishops and abbots. As long as the emperor was also considered a holy person and the pope and the emperor were organs of one order, this seemed unproblematic. In this period, the political order was religious in its substance; a sacred order that encompassed all spheres of life without separation into spiritual and secular, church and state. The pope and the emperor were not representatives of the spiritual order on the one hand and of the secular order on the other. Both represented, rather within the one "res publica christiana"[6], different functions of power, but the emperor was just as much a holy person as the pope.

In Worms, at the Synod of 1076, the conflict worsened, and the former Pope Gregory VII banished Emperor Henry IV, who had previously tried to depose the Pope at the Synod. This was followed by the Doctrine of the Two Swords, which distinguished between the secular and spiritual orders or power. Many scholars see in this dispute or its outcome a significant revolution in the legal tradition of today's states in Western Europe as well as North America. As a result, the Investiture Controversy would have unleashed political forces that, particularly on European and later North American soil, would have resulted in the developments we see today. The forces that were unleashed in connection with the division of faith (Reformation) led to countless wars and battles as well as untold suffering. At the same time, the separation of spiritual and secular power was not a de-Christianization of Europe or secular power – as the confessional civil wars show clearly. Rather, these developments led to a relief of the spiritual power while at the same time maintaining the Christian coloring of the respective regions or states.

In Germany, the confessional wars contributed to the process of secularization. When Christianity split into different sections, a secular power that was based on religion got caught up in the fighting that came with the different

5 Leicht, "Die Verfassung des Deutschen Reiches."

6 For the concept and content that is not elaborated here, see Kreß 2012 and the literature cited there.

faiths. On the other hand, secular rulers used religion to enforce their interests. One attempt to escape this situation was for the state to organize itself only in secular terms in order to put an end to the confessional civil wars. One way to do this was to legitimize secular power no longer in religious terms, but only in secular terms. On the basis of such a secular basis of legitimacy, the adherents of other denominations could also find the necessary recognition on the part of the state. The focus should no longer be on religion, but on the coexistence of all citizens.

The principle of "Cuius regio, eius religio" was found to be the lowest common denominator. This formula enabled politics to override rival religious groups and act as a authority. In other words, state power legitimized itself out of its service to inner-worldly goals: first, internal and external peace; then freedom and equality of citizens; from the 19th century, the social security of the population, and from the 20th century, the protection of the natural foundations of life.

Applied to the doctrine of the two swords, the above developments meant that the spiritual sword lost importance. The secular sword, or secular power, gained the upper hand and emancipated itself from religion or the church.

The French Revolution[7], or rather the developments that followed it, set another important process in motion. Religion was now elevated to the level of a fundamental personal or individual "right." Religion was thus relegated to the sphere of the private and subsequently became a matter of interest and appreciation for individuals or even a large number of individuals, but without being part of the state order. Religion has become a private matter.

In the course of history, there have been repeated efforts, both in Germany and in Western Europe and North America, to declare the consequences of the emancipation of state and church outlined above null and void and to establish a "Christian state". These political efforts could not prevail, and cannot be further elaborated within the framework of this article.

3 Turkey: The Turkish Religious Authority on Behalf of Turkish Politics

The establishment of the Turkish religious authority[8], Diyanet Işleri Başkanlığı (Presidium for Religious Affairs; Diyanet for short)[9] owes much to an ambitious

7 Other important developments, such as the Reformation or the Thirty Years War, cannot be considered here due to lack of space.

8 See Yavuz 2003.

9 On the history and self-image of the religious authority, cf. Diyanet website.

process of reorganization. The caliphate[10] was replaced by an authority, that was to meet its goals as well as the political and social reorganization and transformation plans of the Turkish Republic. At the same time, it was meant to compensate for the identity crisis that had been caused by the continuous breaking with Ottoman tradition. In other words, even though the remnant of an Ottoman religious identity that remained at the time was to be pushed out of the minds and hearts of the population by the new state leadership, especially by the administration of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and replaced by an ethno-nationalist religious identity, the reorganization and transformation was consciously carried out with the help of a newly founded institution that in some ways recalled earlier religious institutions. The substantive legitimation, however, had to be different from that in the Ottoman Empire.

For Turkey from 1923 onward, this meant, among other things, introducing a modernity based on the European model and implementing it with a Kemalist emphasis through a political and social restructuring from above.[11] Subsequently, politics and everything associated with it were built on an ethnic-nationalist Turkish foundation that propagated homogeneity (including religious homogeneity) and did not tolerate deviations.[12]

In this context, it can be said for the Diyanet that, from 1924 until the introduction of the multiparty system in the 1950s, this religious authority tried to support and overcome the national and transnational interests of the political leadership in the context of religio-political challenges. Above all, it had to weave Sunni-Hanafi religious practice and theology into the nationalist-positivist worldview of the politicians of the formative phase.[13]

While the Diyanet supported the Kemalist cultural revolution until the advent of the Cold War, its political leeway changed as it began to emerge in the context of the Cold War competition during the period of the multiparty system and the democratization process. In summary, the Diyanet and the Turkish state complement and support each other in their nation-state and religious claims. Turkish nationalist policies and rhetoric have used religious language from the beginning of the republic, through the Cold War, and up to the present day. On the other hand, the Diyanet has used Turkish nationalist rhetoric in its broadcasts in all of its different areas of work.

In 2018, the budget of the Ministry of Defense in Turkey was 8.6 billion euros. The police were allocated six billion euros and Turkish military intelligence

10 The office of the "representative of the messenger of God," thus the succession of the prophet Muhammad.

11 See Çiçek, "Eine Politisierung der Religion von oben," p. 14.

12 See Karaveli 2018.

13 See Flöhr 2015.

received 0.4 billion euros The Ministry of Education was funded with 19.8 billion euros and the religious authority had 2.9 billion euros at its disposal.[14] These figures suggest, that the Turkish government's interest is composed of many more factors than just administering religion. It wants to dominate all religious spheres of life, as well as political and social ones, setting trends and, above all, driving developments favorable for them.

This close intertwining of religion and politics in Turkey repeatedly leads to religion being exploited for political and nationalist purposes. To mention just two small examples: Diyanet and the AKP pursue a common political strategy with regard to Alevis and Kurds in Turkey. The Alevis, also known as Kızılbaş ("red heads"), live primarily in the southeast of the country. According to various estimates, their population share ranges between 15 and 30 percent. Their religious beliefs do not coincide with those of the Sunnis. In particular, the specific worship of Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet and fourth caliph, repeatedly leads to accusations of heresy from the Sunni side.[15]

Kurds today live mainly in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Their number is estimated to be between 12 and 25 million. They do not all share the same faith traditions. According to different estimates, 80 percent of them are Sunnis and 20 percent are Shiites. In the above-mentioned nation-states, they are repeatedly denied political rights.

Even if the conflict between Turks and Kurds does not have a confessional background, it has been given the aura of religion by the religious authorities, as it already had been in the 1980s and 1990s. So, the Diyanet and its European branches are also in favor of Turkey's invasion of Syria, which is against international law.[16] Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, the situation has worsened. The successful fight of the PYD/YPG against the jihadist terrorist organization with the support of the U.S. Air Force, as well as the weakening of the Syrian state, led Turkey to see its territorial integrity guaranteed only by the complete destruction of the PKK as well as the pushback of Syrian Kurds.[17] Turkey's current actions in the Kurdish settlement areas in the Rojava region in northeastern Syria – with Turkish special forces and jihadist militias and the acceptance of their strengthening – underline this determination on the part of Turkey.[18]

Even though violence against Alevis in Turkey is condemned and downplayed by the Diyanet and the AKP,[19] both parties are nevertheless eager to

14 See van Bruinessen 2018, pp. 1–27.
15 See Sökefeld 2008.
16 Schindler, 14.10.2019.
17 See Çiçek, "Ankaras Albtraum."
18 See Footnote 16.
19 See Massicard 2013; Özkul 2013, pp. 80–96.

merge the Alevi community into the Sunni community. In the 2000s, the AKP fought against public discrimination of devout Muslims in Turkey on the basis of the Copenhagen Criteria and freedom of religion. However, it is less involved with the Diyanet when it comes to Alevis and issues of equal rights and status.

4 Humanitarian Islam: A Possible Way Out of the Crisis?

In the examples mentioned above, a historical-critical view was taken in an attempt to show, what consequences the political appropriation of religion can have. In a compact approach, the developments in Germany and Turkey were shown. While the open religious system in Germany demands a pluralism of different denominations in the context of the secular state, the rigid Turkish religious system achieves the opposite. It cannot be ruled out that the members of the "Gerakan Pemuda Ansor"[20] used these examples, apart from the realities in Indonesia, as a basis for formulating their concept.

At its core, Humanitarian Islam advocates a development that could possibly lead to a policy open to religion at the national level. In a similar way to Germany, the critical examination of the Sunni tradition could serve to rethink the interpretive authority over Islamic law. In essence, it is primarily a matter of Islamic law and the normative practices arising from it that regulate relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. The focus is on Muslim majority societies and non-Muslim societies in which a large number of Muslim minorities live.

Just as Rüdiger Lohlker has already noted, Humanitarian Islam also builds on the necessity of the modern nation-state and its institutions, which can establish a political system based on the constitution, law, etc., that can lead to plurality, as in Germany. A narrowing of religion, as in Turkey, leads to contrary developments, as shown. This is clearly stated in Article 112 of the Declaration of Humanitarian Islam:

> Any attempt to establish a universal Islamic state – al-imamah al-udzma (the Great Imamate), also known as al-khilafah (the Caliphate) – will only lead to disaster for Muslims, as one aspirant battles with another for dominion of the entire Islamic world.[21]

The above quotation clearly expresses the idea that the establishment of a universal religious state – a concept which is not alien to European history either – will not create peace, but rather rivalry. Of course, secular states also compete with each other in the context of national and international politics.

20 See Lohlker 2021, pp. 188–208.

21 See Footnote 19.

However, the above context raises an essential point that has been subsumed in this article under the term religious "utopias". Just as in the history of Europe, in the present history the claim of jihadist or radical Islamic fundamentalists to establish an Islamic state leads to catastrophic developments. We must not limit ourselves to jihadist terrorist organizations. When people's rights are violated and people are forced to follow a certain religion, for example, not only in Iran but also elsewhere, Muslims can become disconnected from their religious traditions.

Also in Turkey, the rigid religious policies of the AKP, in cooperation with the Diyanet, are causing many citizens to distance themselves from religion. There is no successful script for the interaction of politics and religion. However, the case study of Germany shows, that political neutrality in matters of religion, and the resulting equal treatment of all religions, is a possible way to limit the violence-bringing elements of religious beliefs. In the following statement, the proponents of Humanitarian Islam make this point very clear.

> We call upon people of goodwill of every faith and nation to join in building a global consensus to prevent the political weaponization of Islam, whether by Muslims or non-Muslims, and to curtail the spread of communal hatred by fostering the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order, founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being.[22]

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A Christian Perspective on Humanitarian Islam

Considerations on the "Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration"

Jakob Helmut Deibl

Abstract

This article responds to the "Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam" from a Christian theological perspective, based on the conviction that, also from a Christian perspective, the Qu'ran must be understood as a revelation of God. First, the article traces the changes in the official Catholic view of Islam from the Second Vatican Council to the Abu Dhabi Declaration "A Document of Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together". The article then explores the "Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration" in three steps. First, it refers to its being addressed to all people of good will, which calls for new alliances across the borders of religions and nations. Second, it contrasts an attitude of supremacy with one of sensibility, in which actions are understood as contributions rather than assertions of domination. Third, the article suggests that every new theological declaration also requires an aesthetic expression.

Key Words

Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration, Humanitarian Islam, Indonesia, Catholic Church

> For when hearts have succeeded in drawing close to each other to address the Almighty, men begin straightway to set up bonds of brotherhood – and that is a condition for the happy fulfilment of a shared task. (Pope Paul VI at the Airport in Djakarta/Indonesia, 4 December 1970)[1]

1 Introductory Remarks

The following reflections are an examination of the *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam: Towards the Recontextualization of Islamic*

1 Paul VI 1970a.

Teachings, for the Sake of World Peace and Harmony Between Civilizations.[2] The declaration was adopted in May 2017 in Jombang (East Java, Indonesia) and is composed of 112 sections. Reading the Declaration, I have the impression of hearing the voice of young people who are no longer willing to perpetuate the enmities that have divided peoples and religions for centuries. They are striving "towards the emergence of a new reality" (*GPA* 109). At a *Meeting with the Leaders of the Major Religious Communities of Indonesia* on 10 October 1989 in Djakarta, Pope John Paul II pointed out the responsibility of all religious representatives to build "a society of cooperation, tolerance and unity within diversity". This task is "a sacred trust". But then he unexpectedly turned to the young people and entrusted them with what he initially described as the task of the religious leaders:

> *So too, do Indonesia's young people*. For this reason I would appeal to them with the words I addressed to young Muslims in Morocco in 1985. "Normally", I said, "young people look towards the future, they long for a more just and more human world … (But) young people can build a better future if they first *put their faith in God* and if they pledge themselves to build this new world in accordance with God's plan, with wisdom and trust".[3]

Concerning the task and the opportunities presented to young people, this quotation seems to resonate with the *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration*.

My reflections are framed from the perspective of a Christian Catholic theologian who lives in Europe. If in the following I repeatedly speak from the perspective of the first person ("I"), this has to do with the specific location from which I look at the Declaration.[4] From this (certainly limited) position, I have read the *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration* with great interest and feel personally addressed by it, as it explicitly opens a door to people from other religions and other parts of the world. It speaks of

> the vision of Humanitarian Islam, which is inextricably linked to the emergence of a new reality in which people of every faith and nation renounce the use of religion as a means to justify hatred and violence towards those who adhere to a different faith. (*GPA* 109)

Pope Francis writes in his letter *Evangelii Gaudium*, in which he sets out the programme for his pontificate in November 2013, that whoever preaches the

2 Gerakan Pemuda Ansor 2017, henceforth: GPA.

3 John Paul II 1989.

4 On speaking in the first person in philosophy and theology cf. Vattimo 1997, p. 7; Illich 2006, pp. 172–178.

Gospel "ought to let others be constantly evangelizing"[5] him/her. Pope John Paul II took the same line in his address to religious leaders in Djakarta:

> Respectful dialogue with others also enables us to be enriched by their insights, challenged by their questions and impelled to deepen our knowledge of the truth. Far from stifling dialogue or rendering it superfluous, *a commitment to the truth of one's religious tradition by* its very nature *makes dialogue with others both necessary and fruitful.*[6]

The reading of the *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration* can become the starting point for such a dialogue for Christians. It can trigger a process of being evangelised and thus of coming to a better understanding of the Holy Scriptures of one's own tradition.

I cannot comment on the inner-Islamic and bilateral matters discussed in the document; they require inner-Islamic discussion and dialogue between the respective states. My reflections are of a theological nature and motivated by the conviction that probably the most urgent theological task of Christianity in the coming years will be to ask how Christianity can shape the encounter with Islam and what it can learn from Islam.[7]

It is about an encounter with a broadly differentiated tradition that has a transformative historical power [Geschichtsmächtigkeit] and that explicitly places itself in a relationship with Judaism and Christianity. We cannot think of the three Abrahamic religions as merely standing side by side: The Qur'an is revelation that takes place *after* the Torah and the Gospels and presupposes their existence.

From a Christian theological perspective, it is difficult to deny that the Qur'an is God's revelation (sending down) in the full sense of the term. Kurt Appel argues this on the basis of the idea that the biblical God must be regarded as a God of history:

> God works by means of the Holy Spirit in history, which must never be regarded as completely void of the Spirit. Of course, no justification of all the historical catastrophes and bestialities can be derived from this, since such a justification would release humanity from responsibility and prove incapacitating them. But a theological view of the entirety of history cannot ignore the work of the Spirit. At the very least, an attempt must be made to read the irrevocable historical power of an event as having been wrought by the Spirit. Such a form of

5 Francis 2013, 121.

6 John Paul II 1989.

7 From a Christian perspective, it is not just a matter of pointing out parallels, similarities and lines of development that lead from the Bible to the Koran, from Christianity (and Judaism) to Islam.

> transformative historical power [Geschichtsmächtigkeit] is definitely present with the Qur'anic revelation. No one assumes that Islam will disappear from the historical stage, but rather that its importance will increase.[8]

Thus, Islam must also be seen as God's work from a Christian perspective; otherwise God would have relinquished history completely from his hands. This idea follows a discussion found in the Acts of the Apostles, the biblical book that tells of the emergence of the early church:

> Biblically, the idea of transformative historical power [Geschichtsmächtigkeit] finds expression in the words of the Pharisee Gamaliel before the High Council in Jerusalem, with which he pleaded against persecuting Christians: "[…] for if this undertaking [the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus] or this work is of men, it will be destroyed; but if it is of God, you cannot destroy them; otherwise you will find yourselves fighting against God". (Acts 5:38f.)[9]

This can be analogously applied to the relationship between Christianity and Islam. From a Christian perspective, Islam is to be seen as the work of God and has an indispensable significance for Christians. However, the task of reading the Qur'anic revelation as the Good News of God (Gospel) for Christians has been neglected thus far. The reason for this is probably that, as the Brazilian theologian José Comblin writes, "for 1350 years there was almost uninterrupted war between Christians and Muslims" and this war is still going on today.[10]

> A consequence of the war with Islam was the emergence of the crusade, that is, of holy war as a constitutive element of Christianity. The crusade idea was intimately connected with the Christian way of life. The war against Muslims represented the holy work par excellence. […] War penetrated deeply into the Christian mentality. For holy war also extended to heretics in their own ranks and to Christian empires in their wars for supremacy. The conquest of America was inspired by the crusade idea: It was the war against the pagans who rebelled against the true God.
>
> The crusade mentality became the greatest deformation of Christianity in history. It even distorted the vocabulary. Expressions such as "Legio Mariae", "Legionaries of Christ" […], "Eucharistic Crusade", "Blue Legion", "Salvation Army", the "Crusader Orders" such as the Maltese migrated into the Christian vocabulary; Mary was associated with symbolism from the realm of the military […]; city names recall the victories of Jesus, the Virgin Mary or St. Jacob over the infidels. Christianity has not yet completely freed itself from this military spirit. Christianity offers itself to the world not as a message of peace, but rather as a message of violence.[11]

8 Appel 2021, pp. 12 et seq.

9 Appel 2021, p. 13.

10 Comblin 2005, p. 304.

11 Comblin 2005, pp. 304 et seq.

However, it is precisely contact with Islam that has deepened on the Catholic side in recent decades. The document *Nostra Aetate*, adopted at the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), an assembly of all Catholic bishops, puts an end to the disdain for Islam from the highest doctrinal authority. It is "officially the first document that speaks of other religions in a fundamentally positive way":[12]

> The Church regards with esteem also the Muslims. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, [...] who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God.[13]

It is important to notice that the text was discussed with Muslim scholars before its publication. Pope Paul VI quoted it on his arrival at the Jakarta airport on 3 December 1970, when he became the first Pope to visit Indonesia.[14] *Lumen Gentium*, another central document of the Second Vatican Council, goes one step further:

> But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place among these there are the Muslims, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind.[15]

What is new here is the emphasis on the shared factor that Muslims worship the one and merciful God "along with us". Pope John Paul II developed this motif further in the above-mentioned address to Moroccan youth in Casablanca on 19 August 1985 – his first encounter with Muslim youth: "We believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, the God who created the world and brings his creatures to their perfection".[16] Now the addressees of the speech are explicitly the believers of the other religion, who are no longer addressed with the aim of proselytising: The "along with us" becomes a "we".

Pope Francis can build on this in the Abu Dhabi Declaration of 2019. However, the speech act has changed completely. John Paul II came to bear witness to the faith in the one God before Muslim young people and was motivated by the hope that Muslim ears would accept this witness:

12 Siebenrock 2005, p. 667.
13 Nostra aetate 1965, 3.
14 Paul VI 1970b.
15 Lumen gentium 1964, 16.
16 John Paul II 1985, 1.

> Also, it is as a believer that I come to you today. It is quite simply that I would like to give here today the witness of that which I believe, of that which I wish for the well-being of the people, my brothers, […] and of that which, from experience, I consider to be useful for all.[17]

When the Grand Imam Ahmad Mohammed al-Tayyeb al-Tantawi, the Grand Sheikh of the al-Azhar Mosque in Cairo, and Pope Francis, the head of the Catholic Church, signed *A Document of Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together in* Abu Dhabi on 4 February 2019, the pope no longer spoke as Head of the Catholic Church alone. Indeed, the point was no longer just that Christians and Muslims worship one and the same God. It was the fact of a *joint* declaration that ultimately represented a significant step towards rapprochement – of speaking together as believers. Together, the Muslim and Christian representatives addressed "all persons of good will present in every part of the world" in the name of the one – and thus admittedly also the same – God: "In the name of God who has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and who has called them to live together as brothers and sisters, to fill the earth and make known the values of goodness, love and peace".[18]

What is meant by prayer in the name of the one and same God and by the community of all people of good will, which includes not least Muslims and Christians, must, admittedly, be further developed theologically.[19]

2 Interim Remark

It is interesting that John Paul II, in his address to the Moroccan youth, refers to the uninterrupted succession of popes in which he himself also stands. This continuity is an important element of Catholic doctrine and one can find it in many papal speeches: "Following the Popes who succeeded one another uninterruptedly in the passage of history, I am today the Bishop of Rome, called to be, among his brethren in the world, the witness of the Christian faith and the guarantee of the unity of all the members of the Church".[20] Admittedly, the content of the address cannot refer precisely to what the popes had already said centuries before about other religions. In the same paragraph, the Pope claims continuity for himself, but gives it new content.

17 John Paul II 1985, 1.

18 Francis and Ahmad al-Tayyeb. 2019, cf. Appel 2021.

19 Lohlker 2016 shows that the role of theology in discourses on religion should not be underestimated.

20 John Paul II 1985, 1.

This sheds new light on the principle of tradition, which is so important in the Catholic sphere. This is usually understood as merely a continuation and differentiation of a dogmatic foundation, at best its translation into new contexts. In fact, however, we encounter patterns of thought (maybe *lines of flight*) that are always newly constructed, even if emphasis is placed on standing in the tradition of all predecessors. So there is not only a repetition that largely maintains what has always been, but also the surprising opening of new spaces of possibility. This can reveal something new, which then also challenges us to read the past anew. Is there a connection to new *ijtihad* as "independent legal reasoning, employed to create new religious norms" (*GPA* 4, cf. 22, 112)?[21]

From a Catholic perspective, reassessment of the relationship between Christianity and Islam since the middle of the 20th century represents such a trajectory, which has indeed opened up a new space that has, however, so far remained largely unexplored theologically. From an Islamic perspective, one has to mention the *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration*, which was adopted two years before the *Abu Dhabi Declaration* in May 2017 and advocates for "new ijtihad that reflects the transformed reality of interfaith relations in the 21st century" (*GPA* 112). These *lines of flight* must now stimulate and expand theological discussion. I will highlight three points in the following.

3 The Question of the Addressees: New Alliances

The first question I want to ask of a text is always to whom it is addressed. How narrowly or broadly can the circle of addressees be defined? In section 30, the *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration* cites the *International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders* (*ISOMIL*) *Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration*, promulgated a year earlier (May 2016), which states in point 15:

> The Nahdlatul Ulama calls upon people of goodwill of every faith and nation to join in building a global consensus not to politicize Islam, and to marginalize those who would exploit Islam in such a way as to harm others.[22]

The first part of the sentence, the address to "people of goodwill of every faith and nation", is astonishing. The *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration* is primarily concerned with the "theory of classical Islamic law (*usul fiqh*)" (GPA 1) and the "practice of ijtihad (independent legal reasoning, employed to create new

21 Cf. Lohlker 2021.

22 International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders (ISOMIL) 2016.

religious norms)" (GPA 4), i.e. with questions that go to the heart of the self-organisation of a religious community. Nevertheless, in the passage just quoted, the text opens itself to a circle of addressees of every religion and nation and seeks a community of those who are of good will.

This brings to mind a formulation first used on the Christian side in 1963 by Pope John XXIII for an official church document of the highest order. In the midst of the arms race of the Cold War, he addressed the peace encyclical *Pacem in terris* to all men of good will. In the last paragraph he wrote: "And upon all men of good will, to whom We also address this encyclical, We implore from God health and prosperity."[23] This address to all people of good will also plays an important role in Pope Francis' encyclical on ecology: *Laudato Si'* is "addressed to all people of good will".[24] On the Christian side, the background to this formulation can be seen in a passage from the Gospel of Luke – more specifically, the story of the birth of Jesus. Angels announce the birth of Jesus to shepherds encamped in the field with the words: "Glory in the highest to God / and on earth peace / to people of good will." (Luke 2:14)

This correspondence in addressing people of good will seems central to me. It calls for new alliances across the borders of religions and nations. In the future, forms of cooperation that are guided by the good will of different partners will become increasingly important. Goodwill will become a driving force which, in an emergency, will also override the (legitimately continuing) boundaries of religions and world views. Important in this context is the first part of the 15th article of the Nahdlatul Ulama *Declaration,* which states: "The Nahdlatul Ulama calls upon people of goodwill of every faith and nation to join in building a global consensus …" This cooperation ("join") in building a consensus must, of course, be filled with content: The climate crisis, the ecological crisis, migration and the nuclear arms race are issues that undoubtedly "require cooperation between countless individuals – whose ethnicity, culture, nationality and faith may vary widely – in service to a shared humanitarian ideal" (*GPA* 107). This is an idea that characterises the Declaration throughout:

> Conflict resolution should be explicitly framed as a common effort undertaken by sincere people of every faith and nation, in order to prevent atrocities and promote justice, regardless of any individual or collective perpetrator's, or victim's, faith. (*GPA* 70)

23 John XXIII 1963, 172.

24 Francis 2015, 62.

This corresponds to the idea of universality, which must nevertheless grow in local contexts.[25] It is about "the concept of brotherhood that was not limited to Muslims (*ukhuwwah islamiyah*), but also encompassed all the citizens of a nation (*ukhuwwah wathaniyah*) and, indeed, the brotherhood of all humanity (*ukhuwwah basyariyah*)" (*GPA* 20).

The new alliances will show that believers of different traditions can sometimes feel closer to one another than to people who nominally belong to one and the same religion. Looking at section 17 of the *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration*, the principles expressed therein are probably more appealing to many Catholics, even though they are not Muslims and even if they are not from Southeast Asia, than the attitude of supremacy displayed by Catholic European fundamentalists. The passage mentioned states with regards to nine founding figures of *Islam Nusantara* ("East Indies Islam"):

> These Nine Saints and their followers stressed the need to contextualize Islamic teachings and adapt these to the ever-changing realities of space and time, while presenting Islam not as a supremacist ideology or vehicle for conquest, but rather, as one of many paths through which humans may attain spiritual perfection. (*GPA* 17)

4 Supremacy versus Contribution and Sensibility

The idea of cooperation and addressing people of other faiths and origins goes hand in hand with a rejection of any form of supremacy. This is expressed very well in section 111:

> Gerakan Pemuda Ansor shall convene a Global Unity Forum and invite representatives of every major religion to join GP Ansor in issuing a public declaration calling for the end of conflict in the name of religion, and renouncing the use of religion to legitimize or promote sectarian hatred, supremacy and violence (*GPA* 111)

Elsewhere this attitude is legitimised religiously: Where longing "for political and military supremacy" takes centre stage, the search for *spiritual perfection* – "which constitutes the very essence and goal of religion" – disappears (*GPA* 81). "Spiritual perfection" is itself a term that has the character of a superlative ("perfection"), but it is precisely not related to forms of supremacy, which are also superlative ("supremacy" derives from "supremum"). Rather, it goes

25 Cf. Lohlker 2021.

hand in hand with the development of a "religious sensibility". Thus, as the Declaration says, two "visions of the future" open up for Muslims:

> Will they strive to recreate the long-lost ideal of religious, political and territorial unity beneath the banner of a Caliphate – and thus seek to restore Islamic supremacy – as reflected in their communal memory and still firmly entrenched within the prevailing corpus, and worldview, of orthodox, authoritative Islam? Or will they strive to develop a new religious sensibility that reflects the actual circumstances of our modern civilization, and contributes to the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order, founded upon respect for the equal dignity and rights of every human being? (*GPA* 31).

The renunciation of supremacy also means the renunciation of an ultimate and unique interpretative sovereignty of the world. On the Catholic side, this renunciation seems harder than the renunciation of political power. This is shown by the forms of cultural struggle ("Kulturkampf") that are flaring up again in many places, borne by the idea of imposing a "Catholic" view (or what is considered to be such) as the ultimate interpretation of the world (unchallenged by ambivalences[26]). Pope Francis in particular, however, has made great efforts to abandon this stance. In *Evangelii Gaudium* he writes about the proclamation of the Christian message: "This message has to be shared humbly as a testimony on the part of one who is always willing to learn, in the awareness that the message is so rich and so deep that it always exceeds our grasp."[27] I have the impression that this sentence could just as well be found in the *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration*.

If one gives up the claim to be the sole interpreter of reality, one must henceforth see one's own role as that of *contribution*. But this is precisely part of the alternative vision of the future to the idea of supremacy: Religious sensibility "contributes to the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order" (*GPA* 31). Statements quoted from the *Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration in* section 30 of the *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration* point in the same direction. One passage says: "The Nahdlatul Ulama is prepared to help in this effort."[28] This is an offer of help, not a claim to be able to offer the only legitimate solution. The aim is "to bring about a world in which Islam, and Muslims, are truly beneficent and contribute to the well-being of all humanity".[29] Similarly, the papal encyclical *Laudato Si'* states: "The rich heritage of Christian spirituality, the fruit of twenty centuries of personal and communal experience, has a precious

26 Cf. Deibl M. and Mairinger 2022.

27 Francis 2013, 128.

28 International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders (ISOMIL) 2016, 12.

29 International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders (ISOMIL) 2016, 16.

contribution to make to the renewal of humanity."[30] Pope Francis is convinced of "the rich contribution which religions can make towards an integral ecology and the full development of humanity".[31]

Both the *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration* and *Laudato Si'* know that the language of religious and theological texts must also change if religions do not want to engage in a culture war for supremacy but want to contribute to a humane development of the world.

5 Culture and Aesthetics

The idea of supremacy leads Muslims "to reject the richness of diverse cultures, and to pursue the illusory dream of recreating, in the present, a pure model of social, political and cultural perfection that never existed" (*GPA* 82). The idea of purity is contrasted with "the vital role played by the open and mutually enriching inter-civilizational exchange", which leads to "great achievements" (*GPA* 81). Apart from the fact that I would apply this analysis in the same way to Christianity, I would like to emphasise that these statements are taken from the chapter "New Theological Discourse to Recontextualize Islamic Teachings for the Modern Era", which comprises sections 73 to 87. The rejection of a fiction of purity in favour of an open process of cultural exchange is therefore also (and perhaps first and foremost) to be understood as a *theological* question. It is part of a "New Theological Discourse". At this point, let us take another look at the proclamation of Pope Francis, who takes a very similar stance:

> We should not think, however, that the Gospel message must always be communicated by fixed formulations learned by heart or by specific words which express an absolutely invariable content. This communication takes place in so many different ways that it would be impossible to describe or catalogue them all, and God's people, with all their many gestures and signs, are its collective subject. […] The ultimate aim should be that the Gospel, as preached in categories proper to each culture, will create a new synthesis with that particular culture. This is always a slow process […]. But if we allow doubts and fears to dampen our courage, instead of being creative we will remain comfortable and make no progress whatsoever. In this case we will not take an active part in historical processes, but become mere onlookers as the Church gradually stagnates.[32]

30 Francis 2015, 216.
31 Francis 2015, 62.
32 Francis 2013, 129.

What matters to me in this context is the criticism often voiced by Catholic theologians that Pope Francis – unlike his predecessor Pope Benedict XVI – has no theological programme.[33] In this criticism, theology is merely understood as a differentiation of religious doctrine, which must be further developed in its purity. Theology, however, shows itself in the true sense where it engages in an "open and mutually enriching inter-civilizational exchange" (*GPA* 81), which "will create a new synthesis with that particular culture".[34]

However, this finding of new syntheses requires not only theological and philosophical work, but also art: "GP Ansor invites public intellectuals to help lay the foundation, and artists to express, the vision of Humanitarian Islam" (*GPA* 109). The new contextualisation of a long-standing tradition also needs the aesthetic working through of the new forms. Declarations and manifestos like the *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration* and the *Nusantara Manifesto* (2018), as such, want to have an immediate effect, but this can only be the first step of a broader change to come. They need an aesthetic translation to truly come alive and permeate different spheres of life, from inside. The imperatives of a manifesto and the paragraphs of a declaration must give rise to the anarchic and creative play of metaphors. Otherwise, they remain an outward prescription. After all, it is a "call to people of goodwill of every faith and nation to join in building a global consensus. …"[35]

6 Outlook

I hope that the *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration*, so rich in ideas, will find great resonance in the Islamic *umma* and be widely discussed. But I also hope that it can become an inspiration for Christian churches. I quote Pope Francis one last time: "We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing."[36] For me, studying the new courageous documents of *Islam Nusantara* ("East Indies Islam") was above all an exercise in listening.

On 8 June 2022, during a meeting at the Vatican, the Indonesian Minister for Religious Affairs Yaqut Cholil Qoumas invited Pope Francis to visit Indonesia.[37] Will this visit also lead to a deeper discussion between Humanitarian Islam and Christianity?

33 Cf. Appel and Deibl 2016.
34 Francis 2013, 129.
35 Gerakan Pemuda Ansor and Bayt ar-Rahmah. 2018.
36 Francis 2013, 171.
37 Licas.news 2022.

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Al-wāḥid al-kathīr

Ibn ʿArabī's Sufism and its Influence on the Humanitarian Islam Movement

Ghazaleh Faridzadeh

Abstract

The Humanitarian Islam movement emerged in the wake of the International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders (ISOMIL) Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration promulgated in Jakarta in 2016. According to this declaration, "Nahdlatul Ulama offers the insights and experience of Islam Nusantara" which "firmly adheres to, and enlivens, the fundamental teachings and values of Islam, including tawassuṭ, tawāzun, tasāmuḥ and iʿtidāl." All of these concepts enjoy a high value within Islamic mysticism, which found its way into the Malay culture especially through the teachings of Sufis like Ibn ʿArabī, al-Ġazzālī and Ǧunaid of Baghdad. In particular, the concept of tolerance (tasāmuḥ) and the idea of religious pluralism are undoubtedly deeply rooted and anchored in the tradition and teachings of Ibn ʿArabī and his idea known as waḥdat al-wuǧūd, the "Oneness of Being" or "Unity of Existence." The following brief study will elaborate on the concept of tasāmuḥ within Islamic mysticism by analysing the thoughts of the prominent Islamic Sufi scholar, Muhyī d-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī, and its influence on Indonesia's largest traditionalist organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama and the Humanitarian Islam movement.

Key Words

Humanitarian Islam, Ibn ʿArabī, Islam Nusantara, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), tasāmuḥ (tolerance), waḥdat al-wuǧūd (Oneness of Being, Unity of Existence)

1 Introduction

Some Western scholars refer to Indonesian Islam as the "smiling face of Islam".[1] This designation is primarily intended to underscore its "moderate" and "tolerant" nature, which can be traced back to its intertwining with Islamic mysticism or Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) as the spiritual dimension and inner, or esoteric,

1 See van Bruinessen 2011.

heart of the Islamic religion.[2] The association of Islam with Sufism is considered by many authors to be among the most important factors shaping Islam in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago.[3]

Among the various Sufi schools of thought that have influenced Indonesian Islam are the teachings of Ibn ʿArabī, the school of al-Ḥallāǧ and the rather "orthodox" Sufism of al-Ǧunaid and al-Ġazzālī.[4] As far as "tolerance", "pluralism" and acceptance of "diversity" are concerned, the school of Muḥyī d-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240) has played an important role from the very start of Islam's spread through the Malay world.[5]

Ibn ʿArabī's central tenet has been conceptualised by his commentators as *waḥdat al-wuǧūd* (Unity/Oneness of Being), also known as *wuǧūdiyya* in the Malay-Indonesian world.[6] In this theosophical system, God appears as the primal source of creation, recognising and manifesting Himself in even the smallest of beings as a divine breath that blows through every creature.[7] Ibn ʿArabī's Sufism is rich in clear declarations of love for God and love for mankind, which also form the humanistic basis for accepting diversity.[8]

The "all-unity" teaching of Ibn ʿArabī became particularly important for popular, devotional Sufi Islam in Southeast Asia, where it soon gained a firm footing. Its ramifications can still be observed in Malay-Indonesian culture today. Moderation, tolerance and religious-cultural diversity, which grow from the mystical concept of *waḥdat al-wuǧūd* and the "Divine Unity", support an open, holistic worldview oriented towards unlimited "love of the Absolute".

This Sufi culture of tolerance and pluralism is also, as can be expected, reflected in many socio-political organisations in contemporary Indonesia. As mass organisations with tens of millions of adherents, they have played a significant role in the formation of Indonesian Islam and the Indonesian reform movement, which – unlike in Egypt or certain other Islamic countries – has always occurred through organisations.[9] Among these institutions, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) – Indonesia's largest Muslim organisation, with approximately 90 million devotees – and its Humanitarian Islam movement, which emerged

2 See Nasr 2007, p. 5.

3 See i.a. Azyumardi 1999, pp. 665–686; Bin Bakar 1991, pp. 259–289; Johns 1961, pp. 143–161.

4 See van Bruinessen 1998, pp. 196, 201; Schimmel 1975, p. 77.

5 By the Malay world we mean the whole geographical regions that are part of the Malay/Nusantara culture. Nusantara includes the territories of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei. Occasionally southern Thailand, the Philippines, East Timor and Taiwan are also included.

6 See Nasr 2007, p. 221.

7 See Schimmel 1975, pp. 268–270.

8 See Frembgen, 2013, p. 212.

9 See Howell 2001, pp. 701–729.

in 2016, are particularly known for taking a tolerant approach to different ethnic-religious groups.

Based on these considerations, this paper seeks to elaborate on some key concepts and ideas in Ibn ʿArabī's theosophical system of thought, such as *waḥdat al-wuǧūd* (the Unity of Being) and *al-insān al-kāmil* (the perfect human being), that laid the groundwork for the formation of tolerance and religious diversity in Islamic mysticism. This is followed by a more in-depth discussion of the impact of Ibn ʿArabī's Sufism on NU's approaches and attitudes and on its newly developed Humanitarian Islam movement.

First, it is worth taking a brief look at the history of the development of Sufism in the Malay-Indonesian world.

2 Sufism in the Malay-Indonesian World

Sufism and Islamic mysticism are among the most important components of Islamic culture in the Malay world. The history of Sufism in the culture and civilisation of Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia and Malaysia, is linked to the regional emergence and spread of Islam in the 13th century.

According to many scholars, Sufis played an important role in the Islamisation of this region, with this role apparently lasting until the 17th century.[10] They believe that after Baghdad fell to the Mongols, the Sufis brought the teachings of Islam, and of Sufism in particular, to Malacca along with Muslim commercial expansion (i.e., merchants and trading ships). However, none of the Sufi orders (*ṭarīqa*) are explicitly mentioned in documents from this period.[11] Nevertheless, Sufis clearly played an important and effective role in popularising Islam – in religious, spiritual and intellectual contexts – and Sufism, more than any other factor, greatly facilitated the acceptance of Islam among the Malay population.[12]

How should this be envisioned? Current research offers several explanatory approaches. For example, it is consistently emphasised that the religious background of the Malay people would have been enormously beneficial to the missionary activities of the Sufis. In fact, before the arrival of Islam, the Malay world was heavily influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism, which – through blending with indigenous religions and customs – had created a distinct culture and civilisation in this region. On encountering Hindu-Buddhist

10 See Bin Bakar 1991, p. 259; Ricklefs 2008, p. 22.

11 See Ricklefs 2008, p. 31; Johns 1961, p. 144 et seq.

12 See Bin Bakar 1991, p. 269.

mysticism, Sufi missionaries did not strictly reject existing religious and spiritual teachings, "but sought to reinterpret them in the light of Islamic spiritual teachings as embodied in Sufism".[13] Even the terminology remained largely the same. Thus, it appears that Sufis propagated Islam in these areas in a way that would cause less conflict with local values and culture. In fact, mystical Islam, with its flexibility and tolerant spirit, created the capacity to highlight common cultural concepts and values and to use the facilities and capabilities of local culture to aid the spread of Islam. Consequently, people in this region embraced Islam without completely abandoning their existing beliefs and practices. On this basis, Islamic beliefs and teachings were combined with the indigenous Malay culture, leading to the emergence of a type of Islam that can be described as Malay-Indonesian Islam.

However, mysticism did not only appeal to the general population of the Malay-Indonesian archipelago. Early in the Islamisation process, political rulers and princes were seemingly also fascinated by Muslim mystical concepts. Many rulers supported the Sufis and used the mystical teachings of Sufis like Ibn ʿArabī and his concept of *wilāya*, or his theory of the "perfect man", to justify their power and legitimise their government.[14] Thus, Ibn ʿArabī's cosmological and metaphysical teachings were easily reconciled with the prevalent indigenous and mystical beliefs in the region. Gradually, with the support of some rulers, many Sufi orders became active, the most important of which were the Qadariyya, Šāḏiliyya, Rifāʿiyya, Naqšbandiyya, Šaṭṭāriyya and Aḥmadiyya orders.[15]

Consequently, it can be said that the kind of Islam which reached and permeated the Malay world from the 14th century to the 16th century was a Sufi Islam characterised by the mystical notion of the immanence of God. Islamic mysticism and various Sufi orders exerted a powerful influence on the religious experience of Muslim societies on the Malay-Indonesian islands. This experience was so profound that opposition to Sufism would have been tantamount to opposition to Islam per se. Therefore, only a few specialists in Southeast Asia initially recognised a clear distinction between Sufism and other Islamic sciences such as *fiqh, kalām* and *tafsīr* and, relatedly, the inherent tension in Islam between transcendence and immanence and between legality and mysticism. As a result, the *ʿālim*, the guardian and defender of Islamic law, and the Sufi, the spiritual master who imparted the gnostic experience of God to

13 See Bin Bakar 1991, p. 269.

14 See Azyumardi 1999, p. 666.

15 See van Bruinessen 1998, pp. 192–219.

believers, were very often united in one person;[16] in other words, the sheikhs of the *ṭarīqas* were simultaneously great scholars of the religious sciences and jurisprudence. Figures such as Ḥamza Fanṣūrī (d. approx. 1590), Šams ad-Dīn as-Samatrānī (d. 1630), Nūr ad-Dīn ar-Rānīrī (d. 1658), ʿAbd al-Raʾūf as-Singkilī (d. 1693), Muhmmad Yūsuf al-Maqāṣarī (d. 1699) and ʿAbd aṣ-Ṣamad al-Palimbānī (d. 1789) were among the great Sufis and religious scholars in this region. Apart from these scholars, certain "noble figures" also promoted and publicised Islam by adopting an integrative method in their preaching. One example is the Javanese *wali songo* (Nine Helpers/Nine Javanese Saints), who were instrumental in spreading Islam in Java in particular.[17]

Among the above-mentioned *ṭarīqas*, the *Qadiriyya* enjoys a special place in the Malay-Indonesian world. This *ṭarīqa* has been more active than other Sufi networks, and, like other *ṭarīqas*, it has contributed significantly to the promotion and spread of Sufi customs and traditions in the region. *Qadiriyya* Sufis in the Malay world consider themselves associated with the founder of this *ṭarīqa*, ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Gīlānī (d. 1165). The most famous representative of the Qadiriyya and proponent of the "Unity of Being" theory in Southeast Asia, Ḥamza Fanṣūrī (d. approx. 1590), is considered the forerunner of the spread of Islamic thought in this region. As mentioned above, the similarities between the concept of "oneness of existence", Hinduism and Buddhism, and the long-term influence of these two religions in Southeast Asia, caused Ibn ʿArabī's doctrine of *waḥdat al-wuǧūd* – introduced mainly by Fanṣūrī and his student Šams ad-Dīn as-Samatrānī (d. 1630) – to spread rapidly. Samaṭrānī lived and taught during the reign of Sultan Iskandar Muda (d. 1636). With the help of the Sultan, these two mystics' teachings spread beyond Sumatra.[18]

In the early 17th century, the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wuǧūd*, known as the school of *wuǧūdiyya*, and the followers of Fanṣūrī and Samaṭrānī were seriously challenged by advocates of orthodox mysticism, led by Nūr ad-Dīn ar-Rānīrī (d. 1658). Rānīrī was an Islamic religious scholar and Sufi from Gujarat who served as Šayḫ al-Islam at the court of Iskandar II (d. 1641), the successor of Sultan Iskandar Muda. He was a follower of Aḥmad al-Sirhindī (d. 1624), an Indian reformist Sufi.[19] Most of his many works rejected the teachings of Fanṣūrī and Samaṭrānī and the idea of *waḥdat al-wuǧūd*. Emphasising the harmony of Sharīʿa and *ṭarīqa*, Rānīrī believed that the concept of "oneness of existence" confused people and turned them away from Islam. Therefore,

16 See Kraus 1999, p. 734.

17 See Haq 2019, p. 247; Rinkes, 1996.

18 On Fanṣūrī see Al-Attas, 1970.

19 See Knysh 2010, p. 286 et seq.

during his seven-year term in office, followers of Fanṣūrī and Samaṭrānī were persecuted and their works were taken and burned.[20] He also urged the Sultan to crack down on the followers of *wahdat al-wuǧūd* and persuade them to repent. As an orthodox Sufi, he was initiated into the ʿAydarūsiyya, Qadariyya and Rifaʿiyya orders. His affiliation with the ʿAydarūsiyya order, one of the most orthodox *ṭariqas* which is generally very Sharīʿa-oriented, seems to have been an especially crucial contributing factor to his radical tendencies.[21]

Rānīrī's rejection of the *wuǧūdiyya*, his *fatwā* on *kufr* (disbelief) and the persecution of some of the followers of Fanṣūrī and Samaṭrānī had an enormous impact on later religious and intellectual debates about the "oneness of existence", shaping subsequent attitudes towards such fundamental concepts as *kufr* and *tasāmuḥ* (tolerance).[22]

The controversy concerning *waḥdat al-wuǧūd* became one of the region's major debates of the 17th century. In particular, there were heated arguments between religious scholars who drew on the works of al-Ġazzālī (i.e. staunch advocates of Sharīʿa-minded mysticism), and Sufis, who attempted to combine Islamic mystical beliefs with the thoughts and rituals of the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. These debates caused religious ambiguity and confusion among Malay Muslims. The subject even attracted the attention of scholars and Sufis in Mecca and Medina. For example, Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī (d. 1690) is believed to have written a tract on the associated religious problems and issues of the Malay people.[23]

Apart from this, it seems the religious transformation that began in the late 17th century and the fight against what was considered heresy in Sufi teachings both made their way to Southeast Asia primarily through religious scholars and Sufis such as Aḥmad al-Qušāšı (d. 1661), Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī and ʿAbd al-Karīm as-Sammān (d. 1775), all of whom had studied and taught in religious schools in Mecca and Medina.[24] Virtually all the missionaries of the Sufi orders in this region had studied in these schools; even the Naqšbandiyya and Šaṭṭāriyya orders did not reach these regions directly from India but via the schools of Mecca and Medina, primarily through returning students.[25]

Among these students was ʿAbd al-Raʾūf as-Singkilī (d. 1693), who was born in Aceh and then moved to the Hijaz. There, through Kūrānī, he benefited from the teachings of Qušāšı, one of the sheikhs of the Šaṭṭāriyya-Qādiriyya order.

20 See Azyumardi 1999, p. 675 et seq.
21 See Azyumardi 1999, p. 676.
22 See Azyumardi 1999, p. 677.
23 See Johns 1978, pp. 469–485.
24 See Knysh 2010, p. 287; von Bruinessen, Controversies and polemics, p. 706.
25 See von Bruinessen 1999, p. 706.

Singkilī could be considered a bridging figure between the followers of Rānīrī and Fanṣūrī. In his treatises, he took a fairly moderate stance on the above-mentioned controversy. He also distanced himself from Rānīrī in damning Fanṣūrī's followers. Instead, his main goal was to argue for harmony between Sharīʿa and Sufism.[26] Therefore, his opposition to Ibn ʿArabī was less strict than that of Rānīrī. He even adopted Ibn ʿArabī's theories on the "seven levels of existence" and the "perfect human being" and was inspired by his concept of *waḥdat al-wuǧūd*.[27] Believing that God had not created the universe from nothing (*creatio ex nihillo*), but rather through an emanation (*fayḍ*), he tried – on one hand – to distinguish between God and creation. On the other hand, his concept of *fayḍ* is similar to what Ibn ʿArabī called *taǧallī* (manifestation).[28] In his view, although the universe is distinct from God Himself, it also represents the emanation (*fayḍ*) of the "Unique Being": "[T]he relation of both is like the hand and shadow, the latter is different from the former."[29] "Both of them are the same but also different, or different and the same at once",[30] an understanding which was deeply inspired by Ibn ʿArabī's teachings. Thus, Singkilī simultaneously upholds the principles of "divine immanence" (*tašbīh*) and "transcendence" (*tanzīh*).

Singkilī's intermediate position was also adopted by subsequent Sufi and religious scholars in the Malay world from the 17th century to the 19th century, including Muḥmmad Yūsuf al-Maqāṣarī (d. 1699). Being influenced by Ibn ʿArabī and Singkilī, Maqāṣarī believed he solved the problem of *waḥdat al-wuǧūd* by explaining that the existential status of God is that of a real being (*al-mawjūd al-ḥaqīqī*), while his creations simply enjoy the status of allegorical being (*al-mawjūd al-maǧāzī*).[31]

The subsequent modifications of the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wuǧūd* developed along similar lines. Due to the support of many political rulers, the doctrine was dominant in Java until the 19th century; it was later absorbed into Javanese mysticism and local culture. However, Sharīʿa-minded voices also gained popularity during the 18th and 19th centuries, especially those drawing closer to the tradition of al-Ġazzālī and al-Ǧunaid. A prominent figure of this tradition was ʿAbd aṣ-Ṣamad al-Palimbānī (d. 1789), known as the "translator of Ghazālian Sufism". Although Palimbānī shared Rānīrī's opinion regarding the followers of *wuǧūdiyya*, he – like most other Sufis – nevertheless accepted

26 See Azyumardi 1999, p. 680.
27 See Knysh 2010, p. 287.
28 See Azyumardi 1997, p. 174; Siraj/Syadli 2021, p. 10.
29 Siraj/Syadli 2021, p. 10.
30 Siraj/Syadli 2021, p. 18.
31 See Azyumardi 1999, p. 681.

certain aspects of philosophical Sufism as developed by Ibn ʿArabī, Fanṣūrī and Samaṭrānī, whose works he recommended to advanced adherents of Sufism (while rejecting them for intermediate-level and beginner adherents).[32]

Towards the late 19th century and the early 20th century, many Sufi orders increasingly took on political dimensions. Some orders (e.g., Samāniyya, Qādiriyya, Naqšbandiyya and partly the Šaṭṭāriyya) officially protested against Dutch colonial rule. Thus, these orders were politically threatened and intimidated during the period of Dutch colonialism.[33] However, even after Indonesia had declared its independence, the widespread influence of Sufism in the Malay world suffered another setback, this time due to the spreading influence of the nationalist-reformist currents of the 20th century. These trends were mostly influenced by the reform movements beginning to flourish in the Islamic world, particularly in the Middle East and Egypt, and were especially inspired by the work of Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Rašīd Riḍā.[34] Some of these "reformists" later evolved into religious organisations or political parties (e.g. *al-Iršād*) and rejected most forms of Sufism. In reaction to this development, "traditional" schools formed associations that not only defended Sufism against reformists' allegations but also actively pursued Sufism and incorporated its teachings into their institutional objectives. These "traditional" organisations include the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and its youth organisation Gerakan Pemuda Ansor, as well as the Islamic Education Union (PERTI), and the Kebangkitan Bangsa party.

How have Ibn ʿArabī's teachings influenced these traditional currents in terms of their understanding of tolerance and their advocacy of the pluralistic and democratic trend of Humanitarian Islam? To answer this question, it is necessary first to take a cursory look at Ibn ʿArabī's doctrine of *waḥdat al-wuǧūd* (the Unity of Being) and his teachings on human nature.

3 Muḥyī ad-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī and the Idea of waḥdat al-wuǧūd

Muḥyī ad-Dīn Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn ʿArabī, more commonly known as Ibn ʿArabī or *aš-Šayḫ al-Akbar*, is considered to be the most influential thinker in the second half of Islamic history and is seen as the founder of theoretical gnosis, or theoretical Sufism.[35] As an expert on systematisation, he

32 See Azyumardi 1999, p. 684.
33 See Knysh 2010, p. 288; von Bruinessen, Controversies and polemics, p. 709.
34 See von Bruinessen 1999, p. 709.
35 See Chittick 1991, p. 49; Nasr 2007, p. 212.

did not hide his mystical experiences (unlike other Sufis) but discussed them openly, in a highly consistent, organised and systematic manner. He recorded most of the earlier Sufi teachings that had only been passed down orally by Sufis in the past and combined them into a whole system for the reader, thereby ensuring greater understanding. Therefore, for later Sufis, his writings represent the culmination of all mystical theories; consequently, his influence on the general development of Sufism can hardly be overestimated.[36]

Ibn ʿArabī was born in Murcia in the Andalusian province of Almeria in 1165. His outstanding intellectual and spiritual talents were evident from an early age. In 1200, he was told in a theophanic vision to travel eastward.[37] In 1202, he made the pilgrimage to Mecca, where he composed his magnum opus, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (The Meccan Openings/Illuminations). Thereafter, he travelled from city to city through many Islamic countries. In 1223, he settled permanently in Damascus, where he wrote his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (Bezels/Ringstones of Wisdom). There, a number of important disciples gathered around him, later spreading his teachings throughout the Islamic world.[38] These disciples served him until his death in 1240.

Ibn ʿArabī left behind a vast number of works (more than 500), with *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* and *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* considered as the most remarkable pieces. According to his own statements, the *Futūhāt* – a compendium of all the religious and gnostic sciences in Islam[39] – is about mystical knowledge he gained under God's instruction through an angel of inspiration, whereas the *Fuṣūṣ* – a summary of his teachings on prophecy and the divine revelation to different messengers – was inspired directly by the Islamic Prophet.[40]

Ibn ʿArabī's central teachings concern his idea of being (*wuǧūd*), which gave rise to many controversial works on the ontology of being (*wuǧūd*) after him, thus opening the door for the philosophical heyday of the Orient. However, his teachings have long been ignored by most Western scholars, partly because they were too voluminous and difficult for Western readers to understand.[41] It is difficult to explain, in this short article, what is special about Ibn ʿArabī's entire system of thought. In the following sections, simply his contribution to tolerance and religious diversity through his ontological understanding of "unity" and *wuǧūd* is discussed in greater depth.

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36 See Schimmel 1975, p. 263.
37 See Chittick 1991, p. 49.
38 See Chittick 1991, p. 50.
39 See Chittick 1991, p. 52.
40 See Ibn ʿArabī 1946, p. 47; Schimmel 1975, p. 265; Nasr 2007, p. 213.
41 See Chittick 1994, p. 2.

4 The "Unity of Being/Existence"

Ibn ʿArabī's general system of thought and his philosophical outlook is commonly referred to by the term *waḥdat al-wuǧūd*, or "Unity of Being."[42] Although his teachings are largely based on this idea, the technical term *waḥdat al-wuǧūd* as such is not found in his work. This expression was first used by his adopted son and first-generation disciple Ṣadr ad-Dīn Qūnawī (d. 1274). Thereafter, it was used several times by Qūnawī's disciple Saʿīd ad-Dīn al-Farġānī (d. 1296), acquiring its common meaning in subsequent centuries.[43]

However, even if this expression does not originate from Ibn ʿArabī, the issues discussed in his work support the theory of *waḥdat al-wuǧūd* in the literal sense, and his thoughts are consistent with this term.[44] Nevertheless, Chittick emphasises that the *waḥdat al-wuǧūd* theory with the meaning known today may fall short of presenting Ibn ʿArabī's overall system[45], as in addition to the "Unity of Being", Ibn ʿArabī also emphasised the "manyness/multiplicity of reality" (*kathrat al-ʿayn*). The phrase "*al-kathra fī ʿayn al-waḥda wa al-waḥda fī ʿayn al-kathra*" (unity despite diversity and diversity despite unity) would be closer to his thoughts.[46] This also explains why he often mentions the concept "multiple oneness" (*al-wāḥid al-kathīr*) in his works.[47]

The word *wuǧūd* comes from the Arabic root *waǧada* (وجد) and lexically means "to possess", "find", "become rich", "be angry" or "love extremely". As *wuǧūd* (وجود), it means "the proving of a thing" and "the opposite of non-being/existence."[48] As Schimmel emphasised, it is difficult to translate *wuǧūd* into Western languages correctly, as the Arabic (like other Semitic languages) has no verb to express "to be". The term *wuǧūd* is most commonly translated in English as "being" or "existence". However, it essentially means "finding" or "being found", and it is, therefore, more dynamic than mere "existence".[49]

Ibn ʿArabī starts from the assumption that *wuǧūd* "is One", and the meanings allocated to this word point to different aspects of *wuǧūd*. Being aware of the primary meaning of the term ("finding" or "to be found"), he states that at the highest level, *wuǧūd* is the absolute truthfulness of God (*Ḥaqq*), or His

42 See Rustom 2015, p. 400.
43 See Chittick 1991, p. 60.
44 See Chittick 1994, p. 15.
45 See Chittick 1994, p. 15.
46 See Ibn ʿArabī, Fuṭūḥ, II, p. 216; III, p. 547; IV, p. 81.
47 See e.g. Ibn ʿArabī, Fuṭūḥ, IV, p. 81.
48 Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-ʿarab, III, p. 445 et seq.
49 Schimmel 1975, p. 379. This explains also, why, in his works, Chittick does not translate the word but uses it in the original as wuǧūd, see Chittick 1994, p. 15.

indispensable existence (*wāǧib al-wuǧūd*).[50] In this sense, *wuǧūd* indicates the essence of *Ḥaqq*; thus, it is the only existing truth in all regards, the absolute and nondelimited reality (*wa huwa al-wuǧūd al-muṭlaq alladī lā yataqayyad*).[51] However, on a lower level, *wuǧūd* refers to the source of life of everything imaginable, except for God, and to the existence of everything in the universe.[52]

According to Ibn ʿArabī, the Absolute Being (*wuǧūd al-muṭlaq*) cannot be defined. Attempting to define It would only limit It, as it transcends all qualities and relationships the human mind can comprehend. However, It is impossible to discuss without naming It; therefore, Ibn ʿArabī calls It by the word *Ḥaqq*, which would not restrict It. Since the Absolute Being is the only truth (*Haqq*), "truth" or "reality" would then be the most beautiful way of describing "*Ḥaqq*" or the "Absolute".[53]

Thus, *wuǧūd* is the only truth and cannot be heterogeneous. All beings received their *wuǧūd* from Him. The multiplicity (*kathra*) in the universe has no reality with a source going back to itself; they are only the appearances or loci of manifestations of *wuǧūd,* and they depend on it. Therefore, *waḥdat al-wuǧūd* simply implies that everything in existence, by virtue of this existence, manifests "absolute and nondelimited *wuǧūd*". In other words:

> There is only one *wuǧūd*, and anyone who supposes that each thing possesses its own *wuǧūd* has an imperfect perception of the nature of things. In the last analysis, *wuǧūd* in whatever form it appears is the nondelimited *wuǧūd* of God. That which delineates the specific properties of things described as possessing *wuǧūd* is the mode under which the *wuǧūd* of the Real manifests itself because of the laws of its own nature – laws that revelation summarises as the divine names.[54]

This shows that for Ibn ʿArabī, *tawḥīd*, or unity, not only means that God is one but also that reality is ultimately one.[55] This "transcendent Unity" (the single reality) manifests at all levels of existence through reflections of its self-determinations on what he calls the "mirror of nothingness".[56] Ibn ʿArabī describes this self-manifestation of the Absolute Being as "*taǧallī*", which

50 See Ibn ʿArabī, Fuṭūh, I, p. 291.
51 Ibn ʿArabī, Fuṭūh, II, p. 257 and III, p. 454; Chittick 1994, p. 15 and 19.
52 See Ibn ʿArabī, Fuṭūh, III, p. 193.
53 See Izutsu 2016, p. 23.
54 Chittick 1994, p. 46.
55 See Nasr 2007, p. 218.
56 Ibn ʿArabī, Fuṭūh, IV, 135.

literally means revealing something hidden behind a veil.[57] Everything in the cosmos is the result of this reflection or theophany (*taǧallī*).[58]

The cosmos-God-relationship resembles the relationship of an "object" standing in front of a mirror and its reflected "image". The image seen in the mirror is not the mirror itself, nor is it the object itself standing in front of the mirror. Nevertheless, the image is in some way so perceptible to the senses that its existence cannot be denied. Furthermore, this image owes its existence to the object in front of the mirror. If this object is removed from in front of the mirror, the reflection also disappears. Accordingly, this reflection, which is in an area between the mirror and the object, has no existence of its own. Even so, it is wrong to think this image, with which the world is compared, consists merely of an illusion. Just as the world is a manifestation or appearance of God, the image is a reflection of a real object, and in that sense, it is also real.[59]

Ibn ʿArabī also explains the cosmos-God relationship using the shadow metaphor (which – as discussed above – was later adopted by Singkilī): The relation of the cosmos to God (*Ḥaqq*) is like the relation of the shadow to the caster of shadows. That is, the world is the shadow of God. The shadow is perceived through the senses. When the light that created the shadow goes out and the senses no longer perceive it as such, the shadow caster still has the potential for the shadow, which is an intelligible existent, to continue existing.[60]

In this context, Ibn ʿArabī also discusses his doctrine of human nature, which he considers on two different levels, namely the cosmic level and the individual level (*tafrīd*). According to him, on the cosmic level, the human being is the most complete version of divine manifestations (*taǧallī*) and the most comprehensive level of existence; it is a full reflection of the manifestation of divine names and the condensed version of the universe. As the locus of God's existence, the human being (both male and female) potentially contains all levels of existence and is the reflection of the oneness of *wuǧūd*, in which God contemplates Himself.[61] While the reality of this archetypal human being, to whom Ibn ʿArabī refers as the "universal" or "perfect human being"

57 See Izutsu 2016, p. 20

58 See Nasr 2007, p. 218.

59 See Ibn ʿArabī 1946, pp. 48–49, p. 61 et seq. and p. 184.

60 See Ibn ʿArabī 1946, p. 102.

61 See Ibn ʿArabī, Fuṭūh, XII, p. 574; Chittick 1994, pp. 29, 73. Ibn ʿArabī refers here to a Hadith Qudsī that states: "I was a hidden treasure, so I desired (aḥbabtu: loved) to be known; hence I created the creatures in order that I might be known."

(*al-insān al-kāmil*), is potentially contained in every person, it is actualised only in prophets and the greatest saints of Islam and all authentic religions.[62]

However, when considering human beings on the individual level, several degrees of perfection can be observed among them; not all of them are equally perfect. What influences this gradation is their level of individual "knowledge" (*maʿrifa*). Depending on their individual capacities and their level of knowledge, they reflect aspects of the divine attributes.[63] Therefore, considered individually, human beings "differ from each other in the 'polishing' of the cosmic mirror. Only in the case of the highest 'knower' [*ʿārif*, pl. *ʿārefūn*] does the human consciousness reflect on its spotless surface the Absolute as it really is."[64]

In summary, it can be said that Ibn ʿArabī's ontological conception of the world and of *wuǧūd* rests on two pillars: the human being on the cosmic level, or the perfect human being (*al-insān al-kāmil*), on one hand and the Absolute or God (*Ḥaqq*) on the other hand.[65] The human being as a cosmic object is created in the image and likeness of God (*Ḥaqq*) and is the most perfect of all creatures in the universe. In this sense, the perfect human being (*al-insān al-kāmil*) is a perfect image of the world and, therefore, the very spirit of the world of being and the sum total of everything that the Absolute Being (*wāǧib al-wuǧūd*) has manifested in the world. From this perspective, the human being is a microcosm. God (*Ḥaqq*) attains His utter perfection in being (*wuǧūd*) through his manifestations in the perfect man (*al-insān al-kāmil*). God (*Ḥaqq*) manifests in the perfect man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) at his highest level, and no higher manifestation exists. However, the creation of the world did not occur out of a need of God (*Ḥaqq*) for Himself; on the contrary, it sprang from the nature of the divine names or attributes, namely from the indispensability of the existence of a specific creature, in the sense of locus (*maḥall*) of manifestation, where the divine attributes can fulfil their functions.[66]

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62 See Nasr 2007, p. 216. As Izutsu points out, "all prophets, in Ibn ʿArabī's view, are embodiments of the idea of the "Perfect Man". But the Islamic Prophet, Muḥammad, occupies among them a very special place. What is particularly important about Muḥammad is that he had been a cosmic being before he was raised as an individual prophet at a certain moment of human history in the capacity of God's Messenger to the Arabs. Ibn ʿArabī's bases this conception on a well-known Tradition in which Muḥammad describes himself as a being of a cosmic nature by saying: 'I was a prophet even while Adam was between clay and water'." Izutsu 2016, p. 236; Ibn ʿArabī 1946, p. 214.

63 See Ibn ʿArabī 1946, p. 184.

64 Izutsu 2016, p. 223.

65 See Izutsu 2016, p. 218.

66 See Ibn ʿArabī 1946, p. 48 et seq.; Izutsu 2016, p. 218 and 225 et seq.

5 Tolerance and Diversity

Ibn ʿArabī's teachings based on *waḥdat al-wuǧūd* can be considered as one of the foundations for the development of tolerance towards the plurality of religions and beliefs (i.e. religious diversity) within Islamic mysticism. In this sense, the general ontological view that the diversities (*kathra*) of the material world are all particular forms of the Absolute One in Its self-manifestation characterises Ibn ʿArabī's attitude towards accepting the diversity of religions and beliefs.

In this regard, Ibn ʿArabī starts from the fact that various peoples worldwide have always worshipped various gods. However, all existing things and events in the world are reflections of the self-manifestations of the Absolute. Hence, different gods must also necessarily be considered special forms in which the Absolute manifests Itself.[67] At the very beginning of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, he emphasises the true unity of religions with several brief but meaningful expressions:

> Praise and glory to God, Who brings down the Wisdom to the hearts of the Words by the uniqueness of the straight and closest (*amam*) Way from the Most Ancient station. Indeed, because of the difference of the people, the creeds and the religious communities became different.[68]

The above sentence refers to the fact that although people perceive the wisdom revealed to the prophets in different forms and in different religions and types of guidance, there is no difference between them, as they all come from the same source (i.e., the Oldest/Ancient station, "*al-maqām al-aqdam*", which is the station of the Absolute One). The Oldest Station (*al-maqām al-aqdam*) relates to the inherent unity of truth (*Ḥaqq*), which is the source of all emanations (*fayḍ*) from which all creatures and their qualities arise. In the first bezel of the *Fuṣūṣ,* Ibn ʿArabī refers to this essential self-manifestation of the Absolute as "*al-fayḍ al-aqdas*" – the most holy emanation, or the self-manifestation occurring in the unseen.[69]

In this context, Ibn ʿArabī refers to his key concept of *al-Ilāh al-muʿtaqad*, the believed God, or God as created by every individual or in various religious beliefs.[70] Ibn ʿArabī considers the worship of anything to be the worship of God, whether that deity is physical or imaginary. For besides Him, there is

67 See Izutsu 2016, 83.

68 Ibn ʿArabī 1946, p. 47.

69 Izutsu points out that here, Ibn ʿArabī is using fayḍ and taǧallī synonymously, see Izutsu 2016, p. 43.

70 See Ibn ʿArabī 1946, p. 226.

nothing in *wuǧūd*. All gods are ultimately one and the same God, but each person or community believes in and worships Him in a special form (*ṣura*). This explains why he considers religious differences (*iḫtilāf*) necessary and inevitable and does not attempt to resolve these differences.[71] For him, the diversity of religions is the result of the manifestation of truth (*taǧallī*) in the form of different beliefs. He also finds it understandable that people of different faiths reject each other's gods.[72] In that respect, Ibn ʿArabī falls back on his concept of human existence on the second level, or the individual level. Each individual person, as a mirror of the Absolute, reflects the Absolute and nothing else, even if the reflections vary from person to person. This diversity or variety (*kathra*) comes about due to the individual capacities of every human being, though the various images ultimately come from the various magnitudes of the Absolute Itself. Thus, every person worships their own God, who is the Lord (*rabb*) of that particular person. In truth, everyone believes in the same God in different forms, and in this sense, every image (i.e., every object worshipped as a god) is ultimately none other than God Himself.[73]

The Absolute Being also reveals Himself to the perfect mystics, or the true "knowers" (*ʿārif*), in the same way as *Ilāh muʿtaqad*. Ibn ʿArabī warns those who want to know the truth not to cling to a certain belief, as they will otherwise disregard other aspects of divine manifestation as a particular form of the One. A highly spiritual person should be able to worship every self-manifestation of God, because Almighty God is more unlimited than any single form of belief.[74] From this point of view, the Absolute never ceases to create new self-manifestations and changes form from instant to instant, reflecting Itself at every moment with certain of Its attributes.[75] Therefore, the *ʿārifūn* should respond with flexibility to this ever-changing process of *tajallī*.

> Of course, in so doing they are not worshipping the changing forms themselves that come out outwardly on the surface; they are worshipping through the ever-changing forms the One that remains eternally unchanging and unchangeable. These men know, furthermore, that not only themselves but even the idol worshippers are also (unconsciously) worshipping God beyond the idols. This they know because they discern in the idol worshippers the majestic power of divine self-manifestation (*sulṭān al-tajallī*) working actively quite independently of the conscious minds of the worshippers.[76]

71 See Chittick 1994, p. 4 et seq., with reference to Ibn ʿArabī, Futūḥ, III, p. 465.
72 Ibn ʿArabī 1946, p. 184.
73 See Izutsu 2016, p. 83 et seq.
74 See Ibn ʿArabī 1946, p. 196.
75 See Izutsu 2016, 84.
76 Izutsu 2016, 84, with reference to Ibn ʿArabī 1946, p. 196.

Ibn ʿArabī himself experienced this absolute unity and uniqueness of *wuǧūd* that enabled him to recognise the divine presence in all created things and beings. As he writes in *Tarǧumān al-aśwāq* (The Interpreter of Longing)[77], which he composed during his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1201:

> My heart has become capable of every form: it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks, and a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Kaʿaba and the tables of the Tora, and the book of the Koran. I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's camels take, that is my religion and my faith.[78]

These verses are clear illustrations of sentiments that bring together the Torah and the Koran, the Kaʿaba and the idol temple as contrasting manifestations of the one true reality; these images articulate "the predominance of love over law, of the spirit over the letter".[79] For IbnʿArabī, love (*ḥubb, maḥabba*), or "the love of love" (*ḥubb al-ḥubb*),[80] is not only the "true faith" but also the basic principle or fundamental motive that caused the whole creation of the world. It is the ontological moving force of the self-manifestation of the Absolute.[81] In this context, IbnʿArabī refers to the following *ḥadīth qudsī*: "I was a hidden treasure, so I desired (*aḥbabtu*: loved) to be known; hence I created the creatures in order that I might be known". Thus, divine love (*ḥubb*), which IbnʿArabī connects with the breath of divine mercy (*raḥma*)[82] as the "secret of creation" (*sirr al-ḫalq*) or "cause of creation" (*ʿillat ul-ḫalq*), is the principle of all movement (*ḥaraka*),[83] including the "grand-scale ontological movement" of the world coming into existence.[84]

Having gained a better picture of some aspects of Ibn ʿArabī's Sufism and the relation between *waḥdat al-wuǧūd*, human nature and the love of the Absolute, the discussion moves to the reception of these concepts and ideas by NU and its Humanitarian Islam movement.

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77 During his pilgrimage to Mecca, Ibn ʿArabī met a highly accomplished young Persian lady. Inspired by her beauty and intelligence he composed his Tarjumān al-aśwāq, "graceful verses written in the best tradition of classical Arabic poetry", Schimmel 1975, p. 264.

78 Ibn ʿArabī 1911, p. 67.

79 Schimmel 1975, p. 286.

80 See Frembgen 2013, p. 212.

81 See Izutsu 2016, p. 136.

82 See Ibn ʿArabī 1946, p. 203 et seq.

83 See Ibn ʿArabī 1946, p. 203.

84 See Izutsu 2016, p. 136.

6 Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Religious Tolerance

Since Indonesia declared its independence from the Netherlands in 1945, the country has had various political systems: from parliamentary democracy (1949–1957) and Sukarno's authoritarian "guided democracy" (1957–1965) to Suharto's restrictive military regime known as the New Order (1966–1998). The New Order was followed by the democratic transition of 1998, which opened up a freer discursive and political space for various mindsets, including for Islamic thought.[85]

Under the influence of various political movements in the Islamic world during the 20th and 21st centuries, a fundamental distinction is made in Indonesia today between adherents of the so-called traditionalist, reformist, neo-traditionalist and Salafist-Wahhabi schools of Islam. However, it should be noted that this classification is to be understood in the Indonesian context. In particular, the dichotomy of "traditionalists" versus "modernists" can be misleading without reference to local and historical Indonesian experiences. Contrary to popular belief, the "traditionalists" in Indonesia do not identify with *Salafi* tendencies, which are more closely associated with the "reformists". Although traditionalists refer to Islamic "tradition" and to classical theological and mystical texts, they do not seek alternatives for modernity through this recourse.[86]

The most important Indonesian "traditionalist" organisation is the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which was founded in 1926 in response to the Wahhabi occupation of Mecca and the rise of reformist movements, with the aim of repelling their influence on local religious culture.[87] As Indonesia's largest Muslim organisation, with approximately 90 million followers, NU is characterised by its explicit endorsement of Sufism and its Sufi-mystical tendencies.[88] The Sufi ties of NU have deep roots and date back to the time of its formation. The organisation was founded by *kyai* (religious scholars) with diverse Sufi orientations, which reflected those of the abovementioned *wali songo* (Nine Saints). Most of its leaders were genealogically and spiritually linked to them and practiced Sufi-type devotions, yet it was not explicitly intended to be an organisation of Sufis.[89]

85 See Hefner 2011, p. 58 et seq.
86 See Bush 2009, p. 29 et seq. For a useful analysis of the category of "traditionalism" generally see also Zaman 2002, pp. 3–11.
87 See van Bruinessen 2013, p. 25 et seq.
88 See van Bruinessen 2007, p. 100 et seq.
89 See van Bruinessen 1999, p. 719; Lukens-Bull 2013, p. 6.

Nevertheless, although traditionalists were generally sympathetic to Sufism, it does not mean their understanding of Sufism and the various Sufi practices were the same. They have held differing opinions on certain beliefs and elements, while proclaiming support for *taṣawwuf* and Sufism in general.[90] As discussed above, most of these conflicts were largely related to the idea of *waḥdat al-wuǧūd*, which, according to its opponents, was intended to encourage people to disregard Sharīʿa law. However, as has been shown, the moderate version of this thought and other aspects of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings have been present in almost all Indonesian Sufi orders, in combination with the orthodox Sufism of al-Ǧunaid and al-Ġazzālī.

Thus, many of NU's positions, objectives, ideas and attitudes can be better understood and reconstructed in the light of these Sufi teachings. This includes, in particular, its appeal for moderation, tolerance and pluralism, which NU has declared to be part of its "visions" and "distinguishing traits".[91] Although NU's reputation as an advocate for tolerance und pluralism dates back to its founding, its contemporary image of pluralism and tolerance is mainly due to Abdurrahman Wahid's efforts as NU chairman from 1984 to 1999 and Indonesian president from 1999 to 2001.[92] During his leadership term, NU – as the first Islamic organisation – was fully committed to the *Pancasila*,[93] the five principles of the secular national ideology enforced by the Suharto regime. In 1998, Wahid formed the National Awakening Party, which was based not only on Islamic concepts but also on secular principles. He also recruited non-Muslims as leaders at the top of the party.[94] Wahid's commitment to interreligious dialogue and coexistence in Indonesian religious society is also reflected in his views on Shia Islam. While many *kyai* rejected Shia as an Islamic faith, Wahid often emphasised that NU has many similarities to Shia Islam and that, "as a way of articulating its culture, NU members are culturally Shia".[95] This attitude, though disputed by many NU members, definitely had its roots in NU's Sufi orientation and its Sufi religious practices, reflecting the fact that the Shia and Sufism were originally interdependent.[96]

90 For examples of these internal controversies see van Bruinessen 1999, pp. 720–726.

91 See Mietzner/Muhtadi 2020, p, 60, referring to Jakarta Post, 21 October 2019.

92 See Kayane 2020, p. 79.

93 The five principles of Pancasila stated in the preamble of the Indonesian Constitution, are: 1. The Principle of All-One Divine Dominion; 2. Humanism/Internationalism; 3. National Unity; 4. Democracy, 5. Social Justice.

94 See Assyaukanie 2013, p. 203.

95 See Kayane 2020, p. 81.

96 See Schimmel 1975, p. 42.

Even Wahid's successors in the NU leadership tried to continue pursuing this pluralist attitude towards other cultures and religions.[97] This is reflected in the official adoption of the concept of *Islam Nusantara* (East Indies Islam), which emphasises the existence of a specifically moderate Indonesian version of Islam[98] as a "salutary paradigm of Islam in which religion contributes to civilisation, by respecting pre-existing cultures and prioritising social harmony and peace".[99] NU's adoption of *Islam Nusantara* recalls "the beauty and dynamism that emerged from the historic encounter of the spirit and teachings of Islam with the reality of local cultures throughout the world, which gave birth to numerous great civilisations, including that of the East Indies, or Malay, Archipelago."[100]

For NU, a cornerstone of *Islam Nusantara* is the concept of tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*), which they combine – following the tradition of Ibn ʿArabī – with the concept of love (*raḥma*)[101]:

> Islam Nusantara firmly adheres to, and enlivens, the fundamental teachings and values of Islam, including *tawaṣṣuṭ* (following the middle path, i.e., the path of moderation), *tawāzun* (balance, harmony), *taṣāmuḥ* (gentle and loving rather than harsh and violent behaviour, i.e., tolerance rather than compulsion) and *iʿtidāl* (justice).[102]

Following this understanding of "tolerance" (*tasāmuḥ*) and "love" (*raḥma*), the Humanitarian Islam movement developed in 2017 with the aim of restoring the primary message of Islam, namely *rahma* "as a source of universal love and compassion"[103]. As mentioned in the 2017 Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam, the "Humanitarian Islam, i.e., Islam *raḥmatan li al-ʿalamīn*, which serves as a blessing for all creation", is considered to be the inspirational source of this movement, which shall "be dedicated to the well-being of humanity as a whole – and to the fostering of a truly global civilisation".[104]

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97 See van Bruinessen 1996, pp. 163–189.

98 See Mietzner/Muhtadi 2020, p. 64.

99 ISOMIL Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration 2016, § 1.

100 ISOMIL Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration 2016, § 2.

101 The more conventional way of rendering raḥma in English may be "mercy" or "compassion". However, its translation into "love" by NU may also be influenced by Ibn'Arabī, who – as mentioned above – connects love (ḥubb) with the divine mercy (raḥma).

102 The Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration 2016, § 6.

103 Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam, § 94.

104 Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam, § 104.

However, similar to any other human-constructed movement, NU's tolerant stances and its image as a force of *tasāmuḥ* have also been subject to far-reaching criticism. Some scholars, such as Fealy[105] and Bush[106], have emphasised NU's deep political dimensions and the associated material and organisational benefits. For these authors, NU's attitude towards pluralism and diversity only serves as strategic tool for its political pursuits and aspirations. Others, like Mietzner and Muhtadi[107], have examined the real actions and behaviour of NU members, in contrast to their written declarations and "rhetorical" self-expressions. In their large-scale surveys, they have concluded that, in reality, NU members and supporters were "generally as intolerant of religious minorities as the rest of the Indonesian Muslim population".[108] In this regard, they refer to both historical and current practices of NU members and followers, such as NU's involvement in some key events in Indonesian politics in the 1950s and 1960s, or its role in the persecution of minorities, such as the Ahmadis and the Shiites, (e.g., the cases of *Bangil* or *Sampang*),[109] or the real mindset and practical behaviour of its followers towards other non-Muslim ethnic groups (e.g., the Chinese). Based on their findings, they argue that the "modern image of NU as a principled advocate for pluralism, tolerance and democracy" contrasts sharply with its real current and historical actions.[110] For Mietzner and Muhtadi, NU's adoption of *Islam Nusantara* and its pursuit of pluralism "must be primarily understood as a campaign to eliminate religious competitors that could threaten NU's dominance"[111] and therefore as "as a strategic rhetorical instrument rather than as an ideational principle to guide the daily lives of NU followers".[112]

How can this duality of "theory" and "practice" among NU followers be explained? One explanation might be found in a generalisation of Henry Corbin's thesis on the emergence of secularism: If an institution founded on the basis of any spirituality (whether Islamic, Christian, or Hindu) were ascribed political and economic power, and, moreover, managed itself more or less bureaucratically, the risk exists that a totalitarian system could emerge.[113]

105 See Fealy 1996.
106 See Bush 2009.
107 See Mietzner/Muhtadi 2018, pp. 479–97; Mietzner/Muhtadi 2019, pp. 155–74; Mietzner/Muhtadi 2020, pp. 58–84.
108 Mietzner/Muhtadi 2020, p. 58.
109 On NU's attitude towards the Shia see Kayane 2020, pp. 78–96.
110 See Mietzner/Muhtadi 2020, p. 63.
111 Mietzner/Muhtadi 2020, p. 61.
112 Mietzner/Muhtadi 2020, p. 66.
113 See Corbin 1971, pp. 150–167.

Of course, NU and the Humanitarian Islam movement are far from being totalitarian; on the contrary, it is their goal to combat all forms of totalitarianism and absolutism (particularly by advocating pluralism and diversity). However, they must guard against this goal turning into its opposite. It is necessary to look closely at the actual issue that worries Corbin, namely the coupling of mystical or religious spirituality with any kind of political power. Especially in terms of implementing purely abstract ideas such as "tolerance" and "plurality" or mystical teachings like *waḥdat al-wuǧūd* on the socio-political level, the political circumstances significantly affect the ways that religious "institutions" (e.g., NU), or even religious states articulate their interests to obtain a power advantage.

This leads to the next general remark: Regardless of the extent to which it is possible to rely on the abovementioned critical studies, the fact that written theories and abstract ideas can never fully correspond to what is happening in reality should not be forgotten. Theories create their own reality or their own structured truth. However, this structured reality can be interpreted by researchers, because, in their realm of reality, concepts and ideas relate to possible behaviours and classification patterns, which can be identified and interpreted, thereby leading to a connection to reality. Nevertheless, the question of the duality of theory and praxis wrongly assumes there is always a one-to-one relationship, or direct interrelationship, between theories and the objective reality. Such a premise could rarely be realized in the whole of human history. One need only look at the highly developed constitutional texts of several countries. Almost all of these texts, even those in totalitarian regimes, acknowledge human rights, justice and human dignity. These are all universally recognised values and ideas, yet they are pure abstractions and conceptions. Ultimately, however, it is – inter alia – political and socio-economic concerns that might shape the historical-objective reality in the implementation of these abstractions.

There is hardly a society that can be politically and economically guided by philosophers and Sufis. It would be erroneous to assume that the interplay of ideas and social reality follows an inevitable process guided by logical rules. Thus, it is necessary to accept that the role of theories, ideas and philosophical teachings in the unfolding of social phenomena (or social reality in general), including in the rise and fall of societies, is often not as great as assumed. Otherwise, it would be very easy to create a utopia on earth. Societies have never evolved according to theories; instead, they have unfolded through people with desires, memories, and histories. Nevertheless, people have no choice but to try to implement those ideas and values that feel more connected to moral realities, because ideas can only survive if they find their

own interpreters within history to develop them further. On the other hand, it should not be ignored that at certain times, socio-political concepts and ideas may also show great transforming potential and can thus unfold an unprecedented dynamism. By releasing their semantic and pragmatic potentials, these concepts not only indicate what is laid out in the historical background of the people, but rather articulate hopes and expectations, which can in turn trigger new experiences and "anticipate" new horizons.[114] This is where NU and the Humanitarian Islam movement can gain the upper hand, as they endeavour to fulfil this potential by acknowledging Islamic mysticism and its spiritual teachings of love and wisdom. By internalising this heritage and striving to implement and entrench it as much as humanly possible – preferably independently from political power struggles – they have the ability to reveal the "smiling face of Islam" to the world once again.

7 Conclusion

The Islam which reached and spread through the Malay world from the 14th to the 16th century was a type of Sufi Islam characterised by the mystical notion of the immanence of God. This study has shown how Islamic mysticism, in terms of "love of the Absolute", became the focus of both popular and elite piety in Southeast Asia.

In this regard, this essay discussed a unique phenomenon, namely the role of Ibn ʿArabī's mystical worldview of the "unity of multiplicity", in the form of *waḥdat al-wuǧūd* (Unity of Existence), in shaping the Sufi Islamic discourse in the region. On the basis of the rough outline provided here of some important aspects of Ibn ʿArabī's Sufism, it would be fair to say that his teachings, particularly his theories on human nature – the "perfect human being" (*al-insān al-kāmil*) and "oneness of being" – offers an appropriate philosophical basis for a school of thought that can produce a moderate and tolerant attitude towards other beliefs and religions. This worldview can contribute "to a blurring of borders between external religious forms and believing in the true unity of religions",[115] since in this view, all religions originated from a single source, and all are – despite their diversity – manifestations and reflections of true religious unity.

While remaining faithful to this Sufi heritage, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) – the largest religious organisation in Indonesia – and its Humanitarian Islam

114 Koselleck 2006, p. 10.

115 Schimmel, Mystical dimensions, p. 286.

movement are advocating for the realisation of religious moderation and tolerance in the world. This goal would be all the better accomplished if NU encouraged its followers and community to internalise and practice the values of Humanitarian Islam and ethnic-religious tolerance and if it strove to integrate this new horizon in each of its socio-political activities (ideally, irrespective of its various vested interests and potential material benefits).

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Sufism as the Guarantee for Humanitarian Islam?

Contemporary Sufi Interpretations of sharīʿa *and* raḥma

Yunus Hentschel

Abstract

In this article, the core ideas of the Humanitarian Islam project are discussed against selected voices from the polyphonic field of present-day Sufism. The Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) propagates a need of a renewal of sharīʿa-interpretations to realise Humanitarian Islam. This claim will be challenged in juxtaposing it with contemporary Sufi reflections on *sharīʿa* (divine law) and *raḥma* (divine mercy) as continuous interpretations of centuries-old teaching traditions. These understandings of sharīʿa and raḥma of the interviewed Sufis are examined as universal, dynamic spiritual-ethical frames of reference to act "correctly" and "merciful" within a given society. Additionally, this paper will problematise dichotomies regarding Sufism and other forms of Muslim expression which are perpetuated by the NU in their manifestos for establishing Humanitarian Islam.

Key Words

Sufism, Humanitarian Islam, sharīʿa, raḥma, Qurʾān

1 Introduction

The aim of this article is to discuss core ideas of the *Humanitarian Islam* project against selected voices from the polyphonic field of present-day Sufism. The point of reference of this exploration is the vision of establishing a *Humanitarian Islam* (*al-islām li-l-insānīyah*), a socioreligious call of action put forward by the Indonesian Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the world-wide biggest association of Muslim scholars (for references see below). The intention of this call is to use the spiritual and ethical foundations of Islam for the benefit of humanity as a whole. The NU proposes a "new," "reconceptualized" approach toward *sharīʿa* (divine law) and *raḥma* (divine mercy) as only a reconfiguration of traditional Muslim legal interpretations would allow for a transformation of one's character toward a "noble character" (*akhlāq karīma*). Such

transformation would lead to differentiated societal perspectives and an optimised behavior, especially regarding non-Muslims. This article will challenge the NU propagated need of a renewal of *sharīʿa*-interpretations in juxtaposing this claim with contemporary Sufi reflections on *sharīʿa* and *raḥma* as continuous interpretations of centuries-old teaching traditions. Additionally, this paper will problematise dichotomies regarding Sufism and other forms of Muslim expression which are perpetuated by the NU in their call for a *Humanitarian Islam*.

The prime empirical basis for this analysis is represented by nine Sufis who have been interviewed for the author's dissertation project *Present-day Sufi Approaches to the Qurʾān*.[1] There, philology was combined with a qualitative social research approach to demonstrate the complexity and diversity of historical as well as contemporary Sufi engagement with the Qurʾān, providing original exegetical perspectives on an array of issues. Fourteen Sufi leaders, male and female, trained in different Sufi "ways" (*ṭarīqāt*) and situated in diverse cultural contexts (Albanian, German, Indian, Iranian, Israeli/Palestinian, Moroccan, Pakistani, Turkish, and Uzbek) were asked about their understandings, uses, and interpretations of the Qurʾān. The interviews were examined according to five categories: the subjects' self-definitions as Sufis, their ideas on various forms of human-divine communication, their reflections on human existence and the proper relationship to God, epistemology, and the socioreligious implications of the subjects' exegeses. In addition to these results, the data collected contains fruitful material to juxtapose it to the ideas of a *Humanitarian Islam* as put forward by the NU.

The project of *Humanitarian Islam* is outlined in three manifestos composed by the Nahdlatul Ulama, their youth organization, and other affiliated Muslim religious leaders: the *Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration* 2016, the *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam* 2017, and the *Nusantara Manifesto* 2018. It is beyond the scope of this article to critically examine these manifestos thoroughly. As central aspects of these declarations are utilised here for the discussion of contemporary Sufi perspectives, it has to be pointed out that the manifestos, especially the *Nusantara Manifesto* 2018, contain problematic tenets: a shortened and inconsequent view on Muslim political, cultural, and (inter-)religious histories; a missing postcolonial critique toward globally destructive dynamics of capitalistic and neo-imperialistic power relations; and a disputable estimation of the global rise and magnitude of "Western" anti-Muslim resentments. These topics cannot be scrutinised here further, but there are some aspects of them which will be problematised and

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dealt with over the course of the paper: a simplified presentation of Sufism; inconsistent usages of qualifying terms in respect to Islamic intellectual history (such as "orthodox" or "medieval"); and finally, the stark demarcation against other Muslims, especially Shiʿites but also against what is coined in the manifestos as "Islamists" or "politicized Islam." These conceptual inadequacies create inner-Islamic dichotomies which in fact contradict the pluralistic outlook of *Humanitarian Islam*.

The intention of this article is not to polemicise against the NU manifestos, but rather to critically examine their vision of *Humanitarian Islam*, seeking to enhance it with the interpretations of contemporary Sufis. Taking the project of *Humanitarian Islam* seriously, a more differentiated perspective of its arguments and the pointing out of its inconsistencies is necessary to contribute to its promising socioreligious outlook. Therefore, a revaluation of the collective attributions and demarcations from the manifestos will be carried out in the first part of this paper. There, the dichotomy between an alleged apolitical Sufism, one the one hand, and a "political" and "extremist" Islam, on the other, will be challenged. In this, it is argued that the NU's diffuse construction of an "orthodox" Islam, as a deviation from a "pure" and "authentic" (Sufi-)Islam is inadequate to develop a nuanced understanding of the complexities and ambiguities of contemporary Islam. Considering the complex and ambiguous intersections between present-day Muslim identities can be a basis for a dialogue which is more conducive to co-operation between different kinds of Muslims than presented by the NU. In the second part, the focus will lie on concrete Sufi interpretations of the terms *sharīʿa* and *raḥma*. These interpretations potentially extend the NU's *Humanitarian Islam* project in integrating individual voices which are excluded by the NU's demarcating constructions of monolithic collectives. Through this, prevalent misconceptions regarding premodern and contemporary Islam, which are widespread and also perpetuated in the NU manifestos, will be counteracted.

2 The Socioreligious Discourses of the NU Manifestos

To start the critical discussion, a short overview on the statements that create dichotomies is provided in the following. The *Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration* 2016 is the result of the "International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders" (ISOMIL). Whereas "social unity" and "plurality" are named in this declaration as being of "highest value," the self-positioning as "moderate" and being the representative of the "ahlussunnah wal jamaah [sic] (Sunni Muslim)" community, the NU creates a problematic exclusionary demarcation, as it

is insinuating that the Muslims who are not part of this self-understanding are not "moderate" and subsequently are the cause of what the NU calls out as the "unchecked spread of religious extremism, terror, conflict".[2] This self-positioning is repeated and enforced in the following two manifestos. The second, more detailed manifesto – the *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam* 2017, published by the NU's youth organization – declares its agenda as: "Towards the Recontextualization of Islamic Teachings, for the Sake of World Peace and Harmony Between Civilizations."[3] In this manifesto, it is hinted at that Islamic teachings that are not reconfigured in the way the NU suggests are a direct threat to world peace. It is further stated that a "disjunct between key tenets of Islamic orthodoxy and the reality of contemporary civilization can, and often does, lead Muslims into physical, moral and spiritual danger".[4] Additionally, it is warned that there is an "orthodox injunction to engage in offensive war against non-Muslims [...] this constitutes a summons to perpetual conflict".[5] Following a condemnation of several Sunni "Islamist" regimes and movements, like the ruling regime in Saudi Arabia, the Muslim Brotherhood, and "countless other groups that politicize Islam," an anti-Shiʿite discourse is set out. There, it is argued that the "wholesale conversion" to Shiʿism in the Persian-speaking world was caused only by the "brutality of the Safavid's religious policies."[6] The Islamic Republic of Iran is presented as a historical consequence of this regime, declaring "Shiʿite [sic] Iran as an aggressive and profoundly destabilizing force".[7] In contrast, the efforts of the Nahdlatul Ulama, seeing itself as the legitimate heir of the Sunni-Sufi informed East Asian "Islam Nusantara," are presented as the counter-narrative and solution to these destructive manifestation and deviations of "Islamic orthodoxy."[8] *Nusantara* – understood as the basis for *Humanitarian Islam* – is presented as offering a unique understanding "to contextualize Islamic teachings and adapt these to the ever-changing realities of space and time, while presenting Islam not as a supremacist ideology or vehicle for conquest, but rather, as one of many paths through which humans may attain spiritual perfections".[9] *Nusantara* – in contrast to other forms of Islam – is able to realise the "primary message of Islam

2 Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration 2016, §7.
3 See Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam 2017.
4 Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam 2017, §7, see also § 30.8.
5 Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam 2017, § 11.
6 Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam 2017, § 45.
7 Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam 2017, § 41–47.
8 Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration 2016.
9 Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration 2016, § 17.

as a source of universal love and compassion (*rahmah* [sic])".[10] Additionally, the manifesto calls for a "wide-ranging campaign [...] to promote Sufism"[11], meaning in the form the NU approves of (see below).

The *Nusantara Manifesto* of 2018, finally, builds upon the two earlier declarations, but does so partly in a more polemic way, lacking some of the earlier and more differentiated approaches (whereas it also contains nuanced and self-critical arguments). The *Nusantara Manifesto* strongly enforces a binary sociopolitical perspective on Islam and its role in global politics. It juxtaposes a "traditional Indonesian view of religion as a source of harmony and not division"[12] against the "Muslim world's failure to adapt, peacefully and harmoniously, to the realities of our current world civilization".[13]

Undoubtedly, the three NU manifestos need to be analysed in detail in their various discursive aspects. This, however, is beyond the scope of the paper. The *Nusantara Manifesto* will be cited repeatedly throughout the article to critically discuss passages of it against Sufi perspectives. The short overview above must be sufficient to demonstrate that the NU's call for a *Humanitarian Islam* contains an intrinsic inconsistency: it calls for plurality, but simultaneously creates monolithic, antithetic entities. To contribute to a more differentiated outlook for realising the *Humanitarian Islam* project, the following chapters will deconstruct notions of allegedly homogeneous groups. This effort prepares the discussion of selected present-day Sufi perspectives regarding *sharīʿa*, *raḥma*, and their socioreligious implications in the later parts of the article. These Sufi perspectives transgress the excluding categories put forward by the NU.

2.1 *The Tendentious Vagueness of "Political Islam" and "Islamic Orthodoxy"*

In their manifestos, the NU constructs a "politicized Islam" that has to be overcome through reconceptualising basic Islamic concepts to establish a *Humanitarian Islam*, congruent with Sufism. The aim of the following paragraphs is to deconstruct the NU's postulation of an insurmountable cleavage between Sufis and those "Muslim Communities [...] constantly striving for political and military supremacy" which, further, are argued to be based on "obsolete tenets of Islamic orthodoxy".[14] It remains unclear what the NU actually means with "politicized Islam" and "Islamic orthodoxy." The NU manifestos

10 Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration 2016, §50.
11 Nahdlatul Ulama Declaration 2016, §85.
12 Nusantara Manifesto 2018, §6.
13 Nusantara Manifesto 2018, §99.
14 Nusantara Manifesto 2018, p. 36, §150.

do not use the term Salafism to describe this, but their demarcations resemble those discourses which see "Salafism" as a religious-political threat to what is imagined as liberal, tolerant societies;[15] narratives which the NU seem to have picked up and adapted to the *Humanitarian Islam* agenda. Therefore, this tendentiously used denominator is introduced to the discussion and is utilised as a placeholder for the vague allusions of the NU. To problematise this confrontational presentation, the interrelating complex of Sufism, Salafism, and politics will be discussed here to challenge its assumed black-and-white contrasts. When talking about Sufism and Islam in general, or "Political Islam" and Salafism specifically, debates tend to categorise Muslim approaches to society into schemes of "good" versus "bad." Sufis and Salafis – and other groups – are often seen as antithetic categories. The first gets constructed as tolerant, peaceful, and apolitical, the latter as fanatical, violent, and politically agitating.[16] This pigeonholing is as inaccurate in the promoting of "good" integrated (and therefore political quietist and publicly invisible) Muslims, as it is in the panic about "bad" political Muslims. The sociopolitical quest for identifying liberal vs. conservative Muslims in most cases misses any possibility to grasp the reality.[17]

In global discourses as well as in the NU's manifestos, the big threat is often the bogey of "Political Islam." As Rüdiger Lohlker has argued, however, this term is hardly ever used in a nuanced way. Rather, it diffuses tendentious, degrading connotations, which further conflate modern categorisations of religion and politics with premodern Muslim discourses on governance. Arguing along a short history of "political" thought of Islam, Lohlker concludes that the term "Political Islam" is not of any meaningful value, especially in terms of the scholarly discourse.[18] Such history of thought will not be unfurled here, but it will be shown in the following that the simplified conceptual usage of collective attributions is disputable. To start, it has to pointed out that Sufism, Salafism, Wahhabism, Islamism or other "isms" are in most cases used in generalising ways, which wrongly give the impression to describe homogenous phenomena and may easily create derogatory narratives.[19] None of these Islamic "collectives" are homogeneous or monolithic, neither in their theological, nor sociopolitical interests. Therefore, reflections on the phenomena of Sufism and

15 Bruckmayr/Hartung 2020, p. 137.
16 Muedini 2015: passim.
17 Lohlker 2017a, pp. 170f.
18 Lohlker 2019, pp. 62, 86, passim.
19 Lauzière, 2016, pp. 91ff.

Salafism – the latter as placeholder for what the NU calls "Islamic orthodoxy" and "politicized Islam" – will be carried out.

2.2 *The Complexity of "Sufism"*

A core and often shared aspect within the different teachings of Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) is the spiritual and epistemological striving for transcending ephemeral categorisations, which Sufis understand as products of a limited human consciousness. The lower self (*nafs*), which is understood as being part of every human being, is seen as an obstacle to an immediate experience of the absolute divine reality, if the *nafs* is not trained, corrected, refined, and harmonised with God's will. The process of achieving self-annihilation (*fanāʾ*) in the divine and subsequent subsistence (*baqāʾ*) in the world with a transformed spiritual consciousness is sought to be reached through a spectrum from "sober" to "ecstatic" approaches and methods of spiritual exercise.[20]

It is, however, tricky to find a comprehensive definition of Sufism, as it is a socioreligious phenomenon that is characterised by diverse approaches, rituals, and traditions or "ways" (*ṭarīqāt*). The quality of that diversity is further connected to Sufism's general – but of course also limited – acceptance of plurality and inclusiveness. "A wide range of thoughts and beliefs exist within the historical and current positions of Sufis and Sufi orders, and often these positions either influenced or were influenced by other frameworks and ideas".[21] Despite the difficulties to define Sufism, *taṣawwuf* is "deeply and inextricably embedded in the history, culture, social structure and power relations of concrete Muslim societies […]".[22] Throughout history, Sufism has had a central role within Muslim cultures. This role, however, is highly varied and does not fall in one specific category. For one, Sufis may be found in diverse social classes. Additionally, criteria for affiliations to Sufism are not defined by categories such as the level of education and rural vs. urban backgrounds. In its contemporary forms, Sufism manifests in traditional and modern modes, or neither, meaning that *taṣawwuf* often eludes these categories.[23]

Until recently, academic debates also have had difficulties with capturing the "political" dimensions of Sufism. Often it has wrongly been assumed that Sufis are acting merely otherworldly and are detached from any political, social, or economic interests.[24] This assumption, however, drastically fails to understand

20 See Ernst 1985; van Bruinessen/Howell 2007; Knysh 2010; Voll/Ohtsuka 2016.
21 Muedini 2015, p. 20.
22 Knysh 2007, p. 524; see also Ahmed 2016, passim.
23 Voll in van Bruinessen/Howell 2007, p. 298.
24 Muedini 2015, p. 22.

the political potential of Sufis. For most Sufis the aspiration to spiritual development does not mean a rejection of the world, but a different approach to it, which Paul Heck defines as "engaged distance".[25] Sufis may therefore be highly political while staying – at least in their self-understanding – elusive to the entanglements of power structures. This engaged distance is based on the Sufis' spiritual concept of an annihilation of the self (*fanā'*). Through such spiritual transcendental experience, Sufis claim to being able to offer an alternative to mundane discourses and power structures. Sufis understand these discourses as improper in relation to an absolute divine truth (*al-ḥaqq*) and seek to transcend them.[26] Parallel to this claim, Sufis have had complex and diverse relationships to worldly powers, and it has been Sufism's deeply rooted stay within Muslim societies that has solidified its political force.[27]

> [I]ndividuals within Sufism fall into a range of characteristics in terms of religious beliefs, religiosity, politics, attitudes towards the state, levels and attitudes towards the use of violence, and differences in their support for the protection of human rights. Thus, while some Sufis are apolitical, many more are not. […] Moreover, despite the characterization of Sufis as disinterested in politics, in many examples, some of the biggest threats to the state – both historically and presently – have been/are Sufi-inspired groups.[28]

Summarising the political diversity of Sufism, it can be said, that "Sufi networks remain politically influential to this day, and many have used the infrastructures and technologies of globalization to expand their capacity and effective reach".[29] Sufis may be local or supra-local key actors in education, trade, craftsmanship, and economics as well as in civil society,[30] and they may be both counsellors and admonisher to worldly powers.[31]

2.3 *The Deconstruction of "Salafism" and "Political Islam"*

The too-often simplified label "Salafism" is an umbrella term for a wide range of "purist" Muslim approaches.[32] The Arabic term *salafiya* itself, however, can be confusing as different phenomena are described by it.[33] Additionally,

25 Heck 2009 p. 14.
26 Hentschel 2020b, passim.
27 For examples of the political dimensions of Sufism, see Hentschel 2020a: 108–111, passim.
28 Muedini 2015, p. 14.
29 Mandaville 2004, p. 46.
30 van Bruinessen/Howell 2007, pp. 9ff.
31 Heck 2009, p. 13.
32 For a conceptual discussion of the term, see Bruckmayr/Hartung 2020.
33 Griffel 2015, p. 200.

the term did not denote an "ideological" group denominator in premodern, precolonial times. According to Henri Lauzière, there is "no indication that the Arabic word *salafiyya* was ever used as an abstract noun (*maṣdar ṣināʿī*) meaning 'Salafism' prior to the 1920s".[34] Further, applying such an ideologically loaded term to an individual or a collective does not say much about what he/she or they are, believe, or how they act toward and within the respective society.[35] Even regarding self-definitions by Salafis, the term remains vague, as they use "categories that are too broad to be useful or too biased to be acceptable".[36] Additionally, the *salaf*, the pious companions of the Prophet and the following one to three generations, have been a point of religious reference to most Muslims, as "countless Sunni scholars throughout Islamic history had previously expressed their general desire to follow the example of the *salaf*".[37] This is equally true for Sufis who identified themselves as *salafī*, as, for instance, the *sādas* of the Hadramawt do, who are embedded in the *ʿAlawīya ṭarīqa*.[38]

As Sufis, neither Salafis nor Wahhabis have a uniform political agenda as the political spectrum of both reaches from all varieties of quietism to political activism, up to the militant and violence-approving approaches of jihadism. Sharing a common "puritan" creed, these collectives differ strongly in their approaches to society and politics.[39] What these groups have in common though, is a strong excluding tendency; may it be against the diversified discipline of speculative Muslim theology (*kalām*), internal Muslim plurality (especially against Shiʿites and Sufis), or against "the West," these demarcations still are fluid and depend on concrete circumstances.[40]

Considering the centrality of demarcation against others, Salafism can be argued as being a modernist movement reflecting present-day power relations of identity politics with their increasing populist dynamics based on the construction of differences, which react to changing situations, shifting experiences and interests.[41] One unifying aspect of present-day "Salafism" is its adherents' tendency to socioreligious exclusion and demarcation realised through the by Salafis "seemingly universally accepted" concept of *al-walāʾ wa-l-barāʾ*. This concept, as Joas Wagemakers stresses, "expresses precisely their desire to remain loyal to the 'pure' message of Islam (*wala'*) and to stay

34 Lauzière 2016, p. 90.
35 Hegghammer in Wagemakers 2017a, p. 14.
36 Wagemakers 2017a: fn. 22, 243.
37 Lauzière 2016, p. 92.
38 Knysh 2007, p. 521.
39 Wiktorowicz 2006, p. 208.
40 Griffel 2015, p. 191.
41 Meyer 2015, p. 16.

away from all else (*bara'*)".[42] However, attitudes of polemic and excluding demarcation, especially against other Sufis, and the self-confident conviction to represent "pure" or authentic Islam can be found within Sufism too,[43] and – as demonstrated before – in the manifestos of the NU.

Despite the dominant Salafi tendency to demarcate themselves from Sufi practices, the seeming Sufi-Salafi dichotomy is not applicable. The formative Muslim purist renewal movements of the 17th to 19th centuries were the foundation of the later modernist *salafīya*. However, these reform movements were primarily initiated by the "Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi sufi order, which received its reformist drive from Ahmad Sirhindi in India and reached its apex under the guidance of Shaykh Khaled in the Ottoman Empire".[44] In addition to this overlapping dynamics of specific Sufi movements and Salafi thought, this further shows that "Salafism" is not a homogeneous Arab phenomenon. Also, it should be noted that the Naqshbandīya today, which itself is consisting of numerous sub-branches, is still one of the most influential *ṭarīqa*-networks and is "known for its emphasis on piety and discipline".[45] Here, and in other "sober" Sufi interpretations, approaches to creed and religious rituals can be very similar to those out of the spectrum of Salafi puritanism.[46] To further show how complicated and inconsistent the seemingly clear rejection of Sufis by Salafis can be, one has to be aware that Ibn Taymīya (d. 1328) and some of his major students like Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya (d. 1350), who both are main sources of modern Salafis' theological ideology, were themselves Sufis.[47] All the more this is striking, as for many Salafis "Ibn Taymiyya is considered to have established correct positions on all disputed questions of Muslim theological debate".[48]

Considering the inadequateness of monolithic antithetical categories, tensions between Sufis and Salafis do exist. Salafis predominantly reject Sufis and Sufi practices. And there are Sufis who reject Salafis. This conflict may be observed, for instance, within the institution of al-Azhar University, with its strong affiliation to Sufism and an increasing number of Salafi students and lecturers.[49] To understand the phenomenon of the commonly assumed dichotomy and actual conflicts between "Salafis/Islamists" and Sufis more precisely though, global and local politics and policies have to be considered. In

42 Wagemakers 2017a, p. 19; see also Lohlker 2017b, pp. 268f.
43 Hentschel 2020a, pp. 175–187, passim.
44 Weismann 1997, p. 139f.
45 Mandaville 2004, p. 164.
46 van Bruinessen/Howell 2007, p. 14.
47 Wagemakers 2017b.
48 Griffel 2015, p. 193.
49 Brown 2011, p. 6.

applying a political analysis guided by a postmodernist mind-set to the variety of present-day Sufis' and Salafis' approaches to politics as well as to each other, it is necessary to identify and explore "the way power operates in the discourses and practices of world politics. […] Power relations often function through the construction […] of hierarchical distinctions of identity/difference, sameness/otherness".[50]

2.4 (*Postcolonial*) *Divide et Impera Strategies*

The radicalisation of Salafi ideologies stands in direct relation to thoroughly violent conflicts. The wars in Afghanistan – first against the Soviet Union and later against the US – are the cradle of transnational jihadism.[51] But already in the 60s and 70s, under the repression of the Nasserist and Baʿathist regimes, and through the influence of Sayyid Qutb's ideology promoting violence,[52] many adherents of the *salafīya* radicalised themselves, which manifested itself, among other things, in a stark rejection of Sufism.[53] Further, the confrontation between Sufis and Salafis "can be artificially cultivated and deliberately exploited by state authorities in order to weaken religious opposition to their rule".[54]

The phenomenon of constructing identities to create a clearly shaped enemy, is a product of modernist global politics, following colonialism. Geopolitical interests are the driving forces of these dynamics; content and thorough assessments are secondary. The fluidity of these collective identity attributions becomes obvious in looking at a historical example: After the Mahdī-Uprising (1881–1899), the British colonial government was more than concerned about the political potential of Sufi networks in Sudan. Sufism was seen as a "dangerous form of fanaticism." Therefore, puritan Muslim scholars were supported to counteract Sufi discourses.[55] Similar cases are found in other places, where Sufis lead campaigns against colonialist occupations, as in North Africa, the North Caucasus, and other former Soviet occupied territories in Central Asia. At that time, Sufis were "demonized." Nowadays, they have become "a 'lesser evil' in comparison to the 'genuine and deadly threat' posed by 'Wahhabi' fundamentalism" that became "public enemy number one" in many discourses.[56] Subsequently, the terms "Wahhabism," "Islamism," or "Political Islam," often

50 Hay 2002, pp. 26f.
51 Lohlker 2017a, p. 149.
52 Wagemakers 2014, p. 63.
53 Weismann 2005, p. 54.
54 Knysh 2007, p. 525.
55 Manger in Muedini 2015, p. 36.
56 Knysh 2004, pp. 13, 23.

used interchangeably, are deployed particularly by authoritarian – political rulers "consistently and indiscriminately against anyone who dares to raise his voice against the inequities of their rule."[57] An analysis of parallel, underlying anti-"Political Islam" rhetorics in European and other societies cannot be unfurled here, but should be noted.

Historically, "Islamists" were supported to counter Sufis, secular, or other movements that opposed or threated various regimes. Today, Sufis are often sponsored to counter the adherents of "religious extremism." Besides the direct alliance with one or the other side, this promotion of one – imagined and constructed – group against the other leads to a fragmentation of different interest groups, which benefits first of all the respective ruling regime.[58] Attempts to support, counteract or regularise religious collectives are the means to get control over them. In the case of Sufism, this always proved to be a difficult undertaking though, as Sufi *ṭarīqāt* "often exist outside of government influence and control".[59] In the process of modernising Egypt beginning with Muḥammad ʿĀlī (r. 1805–48) "the rulers were fully aware of the fact that in order to control the *ṭarīqa*s effectively, they needed to be well organized and stabilized".[60] Processes of regulation and institutionalising (also with the aim of taxation) were implemented but missed their aim. The *ṭariqāt* tended to even more disintegration.[61] "Modernist" ideologies, however, have had a decisive impact toward a stronger rationalisation of Sufism when modern nation states put policies into effect to systematise and bureaucratise "religions." According to these policies and often under the guideline of a Protestant ideal, religious praxis had to be centred around a transcendent God, who has to be worshiped in weekly, communal, and sober services. Further, these services had to be based on codified doctrines and official texts. The adherents had to be defined clearly and had to be organised. More unconventional and eclectic groups, especially those who strive for an immanent experience of the Divine through ecstatic practices, were classified as heterodox, irrational, and unmodern in degrading ways, and were repressed with differing intensity. Consequently, many of the adherents of, in this regard, unconventional forms of religious expression – as many Sufis were – started to adapt to the state guidelines, and also to propagate them.[62]

57 Knysh 2004, pp. 18.
58 Muedini 2015, pp. 2, 7, 15.
59 Muedini 2015, p. 179.
60 Takahashi 2007, p. 50.
61 Takahashi 2007, p. 50.
62 Howell 2007, pp. 221, 224f; cf. also Abenante 2017, pp. 137ff.

The socio-political development of Indonesia in the 20th century – the cultural context from which the *Humanitarian Islam* manifestos emerge from – serves as an illustrative example for this rationalisation and "modernisation" of Sufism. In the years leading up to and following independence from the Dutch in 1945, the state tried to regulate religious minorities, especially unconventional groups to correspond to the discursive regimes of modernity.[63] Numerous Indonesian Sufi-groups adapted their organisational structures, and became active in implementing rationalistic and purist attitudes, especially against syncretistic and unconventional religious interpretations. As a result, the Jami'iyya Ahlith Thoriqa Mu'tabaroh was founded in the late 1950s; a Sufi association which distinguished between "respectable/recognized/legitimate" (*muʿtabar*) forms of Sufism, being congruous with the official religious policies, and "unacceptable" (*ghayr muʿtabar*) forms, which were not. Increasing entanglements with politics led to a reestablishment of the association in 1979. In this process, the Nahdlatul Ulama (founded in 1926) was dominant. The NU acted politically open – partly in opposition – until 1984, pulled back as a political party, but has remained to act as an important socioreligious and political factor in Indonesia. The NU is an association of Muslim scholars who emerge primarily from a regional-traditional, more "sober" (Sufi-)Islam, known as *santri.* Despite this outwardly conventional image of the NU, there are also unconventional, charismatic Sufis within the NU who have received high esteem as men "close to God" (*awliyā'*), and who were also promoted by high politicians.[64]

3 Present-Day Sufi Approaches to sharīʿa

The NU's perspective on Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) – the methodological effort to detect and fulfil the "purpose of religious norms" (*maqāṣid al-sharīʿa*)) – is central to the call to establishing a *Humanitarian Islam.* However, a "rethinking of *fiqh*" is demanded there, which – according to Rüdiger Lohlker's analysis – wants to utilise "a specific *Islam nusantara* approach allowing for a flexible interpretation of *fiqh* that is based on an indigenized understanding, put in a globalized context and universalizing it".[65] In the following second

63 Howell 2007, pp. 220f.

64 van Bruinessen 2007, pp. 101ff, 112, passim; for a more detailed discussion on NU's classification of Sufi *ṭariqāt* as *muʿtabar* or *ghayr muʿtabar*, a process which has also been fluid and negotiable, to some extent, see Zamhari 2010, pp. 17, 20.

65 Lohlker 2021, pp. 45f, 47.

part of the paper, it is argued that such indigenisation and universalisation of interpreting *sharīʿa* is not a singular manifestation of the Malayan Islamic tradition (*nusantara*), but can be found all over the Muslim world, exemplified by the Sufis interviewed, who have formulated dialectical understandings of *sharīʿa*. The gist of these interpretations is that *sharīʿa* functions as a concept of individual, spiritual transformation, with a dynamic ethical and rational application of socioreligious legal rulings. In regard to *sharīʿa* and its socioreligious implications, all the Sufi interviewees of the sample[66] represented here, claim to achieve, through translating the Qurʾānic message into their inner experience, epistemic and moral qualities, which elevate them above and beyond the wider society, while maintaining their social-ethical responsibility. The interviewees frame immediate, personal experiences with the Qurʾān as the prerequisite for achieving such qualities. This performative acquisition of the Qurʾān stood therefore at the core of the dissertational study, which scrutinised how the Sufis interviewed embody the Qurʾān's meaning and how they translate it into their respective lived realities. Further, and relevant to this article, the interviewees' interpretations of the Qurʾān do have an immediate effect on the construction of the Sufis' socioreligious identities as global citizens. Through their exegetical efforts, these Sufis expand the Qurʾān's multidimensional semantic content continuously, while simultaneously using the Qurʾān as a kaleidoscopic medium of discernment through which they reflect on both their own selves, their immediate social contexts, and beyond.

3.1 *Sīdī Muḥammad and the "Orthodoxy" of Sufi Understandings of sharīʿa*

For the NU, Islamic scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*) and especially legal experts (*fuqahāʾ*) carry a major responsibility for realising *Humanitarian Islam* through developing "the elements of a new Islamic jurisprudence." The aim of this endeavor is the realisation of "*Fiqh al-ḥaḍārah al-ʿālamīyah al-mutaṣahirah* (Islamic jurisprudence for a global civilization, whose constituent elements retain their distinctive characteristics)." The NU propagates this understanding of *sharīʿa* and Muslim jurisprudence "to foster the welfare of *all* human beings," not only as new but as being in tension with traditional "orthodox" legal rulings.[67]

Referring to NU's central focus on jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the following discussion starts with one of the Sufis of the sample, who is a recognised legal authority. His perspective will challenge the NU's narrative regarding the alleged novelty of a universalistic understandings of *sharīʿa* toward the

66 For their profiles and contextualisation, see Hentschel 2020a, pp. 130–161.

67 Nusantara Manifesto 2018, p. 38, §169–172.

well-being of humanity beyond Muslim affiliation. Later, the interpretations of other Sufis who are not legal experts in the stricter sense will be added. All these perspectives correspond with the ideals of *Humanitarian Islam* on several levels. It will be shown that these Sufi approaches toward *sharīʿa* have been handed down over centuries, and are not "new" in the way the NU presents them. On the contrary, these centuries-old, but dynamically adapted Sufi teaching-traditions actually represent the multiplicity of Islamic "orthodoxies" (if "orthodoxies" is understood as the exegetical efforts to detect the "correct" purposes of *sharīʿa*, which are consequently to be observed as "orthopraxes"). In this light, it is argued that the multidimensionality of Islamic "orthodoxies" and "orthopraxes" is not limited to a "standard […] that reached its peak of development in the Middle Ages and was then frozen in place," as the NU presents it.[68]

The first case is that of Sīdī Muḥammad al-Saʿīd al-Jamal al-Rifāʿī al-Shādhilī (d. 2015) who was the *shaykh* of the Shādhilīya *ṭarīqa* in Jerusalem (Israel and Palestine). In 1997, Sīdī Muḥammad founded the High Sufi Council in Jerusalem (*al-majlisu l-ṣūfīyu l-ʾaʿlā fī l-quds*) and presided it. Additionally, the Shadhilī-*shaykh* was a well-known judge (*qāḍī*) and legal scholar (*faqīh*) at the al-Aqṣā mosque. For him, these functions were not in contradiction to each other, rather they were facets of the same spiritual effort. Sīdī Muḥammad argued that Sufism consists of the progressive fulfilment of the Qurʾānic message. Accordingly, the realisation of *sharīʿa* means to "walk with the Qurʾān and to act through it, so that you achieve the character traits of the Messenger of God." Only if one carefully follows the Qurʾānic guidelines and their "social directives," one will "act justly and sincerely, [ultimately] receiving God's blessings and support." Referring to Qurʾān verses like 2:285, 6:38, and 21:103, Sīdī Muḥammad explained that "the essential truth (*ḥaqīqa*) of *sharīʿa* and of Sufism is to love not only all human beings, but all living beings, and to interact with them in a thoroughly sincere, responsible, generous, and cultivated way." According to Sīdī Muḥammad, this quintessential Qurʾānic command was delivered by "all the messengers of God without difference." Subsequently, the call for the realisation of human benevolence and humbleness has been directed to "all humanity, without difference." This approach is fundamentally based on the quality of *raḥma*, as for Sīdī Muḥammad the enacting of *sharīʿa* means to be "very, very gentle with all human beings, with everything that God has created".[69]

68 Nusantara Manifesto 2018, p. 6, §5.

69 Interview: Sīdī Muḥammad 2015.

Sīdī Muḥammad's interpretations closely correspond with the ideals of *Humanitarian Islam* regarding *sharīʿa* and *raḥma* as a "source of universal love and compassion".[70] However, one has to be aware that Sīdī Muḥammad's approach to *sharīʿa* is not a novel one – as the NU propagates. Rather, Sīdī Muḥammad refers to the teachings of the "medieval," and if one may say so "orthodox" Sufi saint Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 1258) who stressed that only the strictest following of *sharīʿa* would allow for spiritual purification (*tazkīya*) and the possibility of the knowledge of God (*maʿrifa*).[71]

In light of this tradition and countless other examples of strong chains of transmission (*silsilāt*) of Sufis teachings, the NU's demarcation against "medieval" and "orthodox" Islam is inadequate and lacks proper historical reflection. Sīdī Muḥammad's interpretation of the "purpose of religious norms" (*maqāṣid al-sharīʿa*) is not a reconfiguration of *fiqh*-rulings but rather a continuous translation of their universally understood values, as his spiritual ancestors have handed it down over centuries. For Sīdī Muḥammad, there is no actual difference between inner and outer forms of the spiritual path alongside the Qurʾānic guidelines. Rather, one has to be aware that the "true teaching of Islam" (*sharīʿa*) is in the entanglement of its outer law-dimension (*sharīʿatiha*) and its inner essential meaning (*ḥaqīqatiha*), which are interwoven with each other. The law-dimensions encompass the commandments for praying and almsgiving, but also how "you keep yourself clean, how you pray, and how to be in control of yourself."[72] Sufism means to realise the true meaning (*ḥaqīqa*) of these commandments, aiming for the realisation of *raḥma*. In consequence, the Sufi – and in this sense an authentic Muslim/a following *sharīʿa* – must be gentle, considerate with, and caring for all human beings, animals, and plants. Sufis must be honest and sincere in any form of interaction, particularly if they find themselves in a context of conflict and war.

According to Sīdī Muḥammad, war-faring, killing, and any form of harming of another person stands not only against the Qurʾān but all other (Abrahamic) revelations. If one sees oneself as a Muslim, Christian, or Jew, and commits a crime, one breaks God's commandment and only follows one's untamed self (*nafs*). In regard to religious conflicts and animosities, Sīdī Muḥammad understands this untamed *nafs* – acting through the unconscious, spiritually veiled mind – as the entity that prevents the human being to "look deeper into all the holy books," with their shared intrinsic call for peace and harmony.[73]

70 Nusantara Manifesto 2018, p. 12, §42.
71 Knysh 2010, pp. 207ff.
72 Interview: Sīdī Muḥammad 2015.
73 Interview: Sīdī Muḥammad 2015.

Explaining the meaning of *jihād*, Sīdī Muḥammad defines the Sufi's primary obligation to strive for purifying and developing his/her *nafs*. In consequence, the Sufi must uncompromisingly care for his/her fellow human beings, of whichever religious affiliation they may be. Such determined care for others, would be the realisation of "complete *jihād* and complete worship (*ʿibāda*)."[74] Sīdī Muḥammad exemplified his interpretation and approach in telling how he acted during one of the wars of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Referring to the Prophetic example to care for and nourish "Jewish neighbours" despite any existing anti-Jewish resentments in society,[75] Sīdī Muḥammad stresses that one must not be tempted to leave this commandment of caring for others, especially in situations of inter-communal animosity, conflict, and violence:

> See, when there was this war between Palestinians and Jews, I came across seven [lost Jewish] children […]. I brought them home to me, gave them milk, and provided them with everything. Their father commanded a big unit of the Israeli army. [But] he has lost his children. […] The children gave me his name and number, and from where he is. I called him […] and said: Your children are with me, do not worry! [He answered:] The Muslims have killed so many of my people! – But he saw that I cared for his children, and gave them food, and he said: Sīdī! I do not know what to say? I only ask God to help me to understand, what entrusted you [to act in this way]. [I said:] I am entrusted with peace and love without difference. He then came, and I gave food and clothes for the children, and also he ate [laughs], and then he went back to his people and spread the teaching. […] He is now one of my children who is carrying the message. My beloved, the most important thing, the real Sufi is the one who carries peace, and love, and mercy, and justice, and who lives the teaching, like the prophets did – Moses and Jesus and Muḥammad, without difference.[76]

According to Sīdī Muḥammad, following *sharīʿa* thoroughly is the means for the transformation of one's *nafs* toward a more perfected form. Realising *sharīʿa* as the manifestation of Divine mercy (*raḥma*) is the premise for successful peace-work and conflict-transgressing humanitarian commitment.

3.2 *Sharīʿa as Transformative Purification Toward Sincerity*

It is a common trope within the diversity of the Sufi-traditions to conceptualise spiritual development and perfection through the following three concepts: the interpretative and lived implementation of God's will (*sharīʿa*), Sufi methodology in teaching and praxis (*ṭarīqa*), and the reflection and experiencing of the

74 Interview: Sīdī Muḥammad 2015.
75 Cf. Jamiʿ al-Thimidhī 1943.
76 Interview: Sīdī Muḥammad 2015.

Real-Truth (*ḥaqīqa*).[77] Decisive for the realisation (*taḥqīq*) of human potential toward spiritual perfection for most Sufis is the development and education of the human self (*nafs*). Untamed, the *nafs* is lost in its mundane desires, illusions, and entanglements. *Sharīʿa* and *ṭarīqa* – as rule-providing structures and methods – are used to control, discipline, and finally transform the *nafs* toward its moral and spiritual integrity. Sufis describe this process alongside Qurʾān 12:53, 75:2, and 89:27 as a development from an egocentric, materialistic, need-driven behaviour to a self-critical and ethical self-reflection, which enables the Sufi to develop a holistic spiritual worldview and experience, in harmony with the divine Truth (*al-ḥaqq*).[78] Accordingly, Sīdī Muḥammad's understanding of *sharīʿa* is an epistemological-ethical concept of personal transformation, rather than a norm-giving legal system. As will be seen also in the other Sufi approaches presented here, *sharīʿa* is a complex dynamic field of meaning that cannot be grasped simply by the denomination of "law." At the centre of this field, stands the Sufis' strive for "purification (*tazkīya*).

In the following, the interpretations on *tazkīya* and *sharīʿa* by two other Arab Sufis will be presented. The intention in stressing that these Sufis – together with Sīdī Muḥammad – are Arab, is to challenge another problematic demarcating tendency of the NU against "Arabism" which is conflated with the import of "Islamism" to Indonesian Islam.[79] The Arab Sufis presented here are an example that such simplified homogenisation regarding Arab Muslims is not valid, preventing potential allies for the realisation of *Humanitarian Islam.* As will be shown, this is also true for other Muslim groups which fall under some of the excluding statements of the NU's manifestos.

Muḥammad al-Dharqāwī is the grandson of the *shaykh* of the Dharqāwīya and his deputy headman (*muqaddam*) of the *zāwīya* in the old city of Fes. According to him, referring to Qurʾān 2:151 and 2:269, "*tazkīya* means Sufism [... in] upholding wisdom (*ḥikma*) which is the law (*sharīʿa*). According to Muḥammad al-Dharqāwī, *tazkīya* and *ṭahāra*, both carrying the meaning of purification, are the Qurʾānic synonyms for Sufism. The Dharqāwīya is one of the "reformed," more "purist" derivates of the Shādhilīya and was established by Abū Ḥāmid al-ʿArabī ad-Darqāwī (gest. 1823). Muḥammad al-Dharqāwī stresses that the essence of God's Law (*sharīʿa*) – as can be found in the Qurʾān – is the "purification of one's soul and body." The starting point of this purification is the ultimate "desire (*irāda*) for self-surrender (*taslīm*) to the Lord of all worlds (*li-rabbi l-ʿālamīn*)" which can subsequently be achieved through "guarding

77 Schimmel 1985, pp. 148ff; Ahmed 2016, passim; Hajatpour 2017, p. 126.
78 Pinto 2017, p. 92.
79 Lohlker 2021, p. 192.

the rulings of God (*ḥifẓu sharāʿi llāh*)." The universal application of these rulings would be in accordance with following the exemplarily behaviour of the Prophet (*sunna*). This again, would lead to "respecting the totality of creatures (*iḥtirāmu jamīʿi l-makhlūqi*)." Under the guidance of a Sufi *shaykh* – referring to Qurʾān 18:28 – one would receive the needed "education (*tarbīya*)" to fulfil the religious obligations, perform the proper spiritual praxis, and cultivate one's character traits. Through this, the Sufi would gain the capacity to conduct his/her life so that he/she interacts with human beings "without any trace of arrogance or hate".[80]

Raḍīya al-ʿAlāwī is a local Sufi scholar and the daughter of the *shaykh* of the ʿAlāwīya-Dharqāwīya-Shādhilīya *ṭarīqa* which is also called *ṭarīqa* al-Ḥaddādīya and is another "reformed" Shādhilī branch. Their *zāwīya* is located in a suburb of Fes. For Raḍīya al-ʿAlāwī, Sufism first of all means ethical behaviour through translating the guidelines of the Qurʾān into every area of life, may it be "marriage, science, history, biology, medicine, inheritance, psychology; everything." She states that God's will manifests as *sharīʿa*. Consequently, the Sufi must self-responsibly try to realise *sharīʿa*. Therefore, the Sufi continuously has to examine him-/herself in reference to the Qurʾānic guidelines. Raḍīya al-ʿAlāwī further explains:

> We have to know God; therefore, the Sufi has to associate him-/herself deeply with the Qurʾān. A true Sufi must know what the Qurʾān is: it is *sharīʿa*. This means that the guidelines of the Qurʾān decide how the Sufi interacts with the people, and according [to his/her behaviour with the people], he/she understands the Qurʾān. The personal experience is crucial: be conscious of God and God will teach you: *wa-ttaqū llāha wa-yuʿallimukumu llāhu*! [Qurʾān 2:282] Act in accordance with God['s will] in your everyday life; also when sitting with friends in a restaurant, always ask yourself: is God content with what I am doing? In every moment of time.[81]

According to Raḍīya al-ʿAlāwī, the Qurʾān encompasses – in providing the multivalent resources of *sharīʿa* – every aspect of life. The core of realising *sharīʿa* for her, is living sincerity (*iḥsān*) and trust (*amāna*), which means applying "correctness and honesty" in all human interactions.[82]

Such understanding of *sharīʿa* is not limited to Arab Sufism or the Shādhilīya Sufi-traditions. Reading the Qurʾān as a universally applicable source of spiritual development, Sufis from diverse contexts understand *sharīʿa* as a universally valid mode of personal transformation toward a guided and therefore

80 Interview: Muḥammad al-Dharqāwī 2016.
81 Interview: Raḍīya al-ʿAlāwī 2016.
82 Interview: Raḍīya al-ʿAlāwī 2016.

sincere and trustworthy behaviour. Basit Khan, a Sufi poet from Udaipur, India, interprets *sharīʿa* as a systematic guideline which a person with sincere intentions for self-surrender can derive directly from the Qurʾān. When *sharīʿa* is embodied and applied in every possible life situation, then one "can communicate, speak with God, everywhere; if you have [realised *sharīʿa*] in yourself." Then one would be able to experience the "essential message of Islam: to be united, to see each other, to care for your neighbour," Being "united in God's unity (*tawḥīd*)" would subsequently transgress communal divide.[83] For Basit Khan, *sharīʿa* is the law which is above any mundane law; in this, it must not be confused with mundane laws though. According to Basit Khan, a thorough knowledge about *sharīʿa* would prevent a sincere Muslim from committing any crime. The *ḥudūd*-punishments are primarily a deterrent to keep away people from committing crimes. But the effectiveness of such deterrent also necessitates a level of self-awareness. If a person is not sincere and is overstepping legal boundaries, it means that he/she has not applied *sharīʿa* to him-/herself, as *sharīʿa* first of all regulates self-responsible spiritual praxis toward individual purification, and must not be misused as an instrument for authoritarian terror.[84]

3.3 *Sufism and the Law – Supranomian Approaches*

Sufism is still often described inadequately as a loophole to Islamic law, depicting Sufis as antinomian to "orthodox Islam." Sufis, however, are potentially not only representatives of "orthodox" approaches, but interpret and apply *sharīʿa* intensively and in various forms. Often these Sufi interpretations claim to go beyond the outer forms of "the Law," not in breaking away from socioreligious rulings but rather to widen their intend through delving into their various potential and sublime meanings. These approaches should not be framed as antinomian but rather as *para-* or *supra*-nomian as Shahab Ahmed argued.[85] Definitely, Sufi modes of engagement with the Qurʾān and Hadith have led to original and partly unconventional interpretations of *sharīʿa*. However, far from being a simple deviation from religious-legal doctrines within Islam, Sufis

83 It has to be noted that Basit Khan – similar to the NU – simultaneously to his call for unity formulates inner-Muslim demarcations and global dichotomies. Additionally, Khan holds a supremacist tendency seeing Islam as the purest form of religious beliefs; an approach which can be detected also with other Sufis of the sample. For Basit Khan, a Muslim ruled society – under the guidelines of an authentic *sharīʿa*-understanding – would be the ideal societal model for multi-religious societies. On other Sufi idealisations of premodern Muslim religious policies, see Hentschel 2023a.

84 Interview: Basit Khan 2014.

85 Ahmed 2016, p. 97.

in general, and also unconventional forms like Qalandarīs had a formative impact on premodern Muslim individuals and societies.[86] Sufis – considering all their differences in teaching and praxis – are idiosyncratic, but authentic and uncompromising interpreters of Islamic law, translating their understandings of the Qur'ān and the Hadith to their actions in an embodied and performative way. Consequently, maintaining a strict dichotomy between Sufism and the Law fails to capture the actual complexity and interrelating dynamic between these two concepts. Let alone that *sharīʿa* is often understood as the starting point of the spiritual path (*ṭarīqa*) toward reaching essential truth (*ḥaqīqa*).[87] A further argument against the alleged antinomianism of Sufism within the history of Islamic thought, is the fact that there were only very few cases when Sufi modes of interpreting and implementing *sharīʿa* came into conflict with Islamic jurisprudence. Probably, the most famous of these cases in Muslim history was the one of Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 922) who provoked a religious-political scandal within the declining Abbasid Caliphate. At his trial, legal assessments were formulated ranging from perspectives stating that ecstatic experiences and expressions by Sufis like al-Ḥallāj cannot be judged through the methodologies of *fiqh* to those that condemn the Sufi for wanting to dissolve *sharīʿa* and corrupt the foundations of Islam and therefore should be executed. Undoubtedly, al-Ḥallāj challenged legal and theological reasonings. Still – and simultaneously to his challenging of normative doctrine-formations – he applied the strictest rulings of all Islamic schools of law to himself.[88]

There are premodern and contemporary Sufis who do in fact not only challenge but purposefully break away from social-legal rulings, in order to achieve the "true meaning" of Divine Law. However, even such Sufis like the Qalandarīs, Malangs, Haydarīs, or other "Wandering Dervishes" should not be defined simply as antinomian. Rather, they demonstrate a specific hermeneutical critique, claiming that they have a deeper understanding of the Law through transcending its conventional forms of interpretation.[89] Other Sufis, like Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1762) for example, have formulated scholarly critical discourses and defended their "proper" understandings of *sharīʿa* in contrast to what they see as deviant forms enacted by other Sufis.[90] In sum, Sufi engagements with the Law are complex, often ambiguous, and at times

86 Ahmed 2016, pp. 122ff, passim; Knysh 2017, pp. 58f, passim.
87 Hajatpour 2017, p. 126.
88 Hentschel 2020b.
89 Hentschel 2020a, pp. 80–83.
90 Faruque 2016.

contradictory, encompassing the spectrum from the "scandalous" and "unlawful" practices by Qalandarī-Dervishes[91] to established Sufi scholars who are authoritative legal experts.

The Bektashī dervishes are historically one of those unconventional Sufi groups and were consequently confronted with accusations of breaking the law or behaving scandalously. Considering that there is no simple answer to what "correct" observing of socioreligious rulings means within Islam, the Bektashīya has been engaged in a continuous process of negotiation between unconventional and assimilating forms of self-positioning. In any case, it would be inadequate to ascribe a disinterest for the Qurʾān or the Sunna to the Bektashīs, even if they – like other Sufis – have interpreted them in unconventional ways.[92] Here, as in so many other fields of Sufism and Islam, there is no homogeneous "school." Some Bektashīs apologetically refer to the Qurʾān and Hadith, others stress the prevalence of the "inner" (*bāṭinī*) dimensions of meaning, and others present themselves as uncompromisingly conforming to the outer dimensions of *sharīʿa*.[93]

Dedebaba Edmond Brahimaj Baba Mondi is the head of the Albanian branch of the Bektashīya in Tirana. For Baba Mondi, "Qurʾān is the basis" of his altruistic worldview, which is driven by high ethical standards. To be a dervish, means for him to be a "servant for other human beings." In a self-responsible way, the Sufi or dervish has to "choose the correct, the wise Qurʾān," which means the application of the Qurʾān's multidimensional transformative potential. In referring to the founder of his teaching tradition – Hacı Bektash Veli (d. 1270) – Baba Mondi mentions the so called "Four Gates" (*dört kapı*) of Sufi praxis and epistemology, which are *sharīʿa, ṭarīqa, maʿrifa*, and *ḥaqīqa.*[94] There is an ongoing debate on how Hacı Bektash – and his followers – have understood these Four Gates: as a successive order, in which the Sufi has to uphold all four aspects, or as qualities which are applicable for different types of human beings.[95] Baba Mondi for his part discusses the four aspects as an expansion of the Five Pillars of Islam (declaration of faith, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, pilgrimage) which are obligations for all Muslims. This would be the basis, but if a spiritual seeker wants to proceed, then the Four Gates must be upheld interdependently:

91 Kuehn 2018, p. 255.
92 Kuehn 2018, passim.
93 Soileau 2014, pp. 424ff, passim.
94 Interview: Baba Mondi 2018.
95 Soileau 2014, pp. 451ff.

> *Sharīʿa*, this is the law, *ṭarīqa*, the mystic path, *maʿrifa*, the gaining of knowledge, *ḥaqīqa*, the Truth. With this, the mystical path actually begins: you have to remain within *sharīʿa*, and *sharīʿa* is the law. You have to remain on the mystical path so that you open the heart's eyes, and not lose the mystical path. You must have *maʿrifa*, to stay on this path; and you must say [and live] the Truth. If you do not say [and live] the Truth, then you are not a true human being.[96]

For Baba Mondi, the Qurʾān contains everything as it is a "divine guideline" for developing a self-controlled and altruistic way of life. If the Sufi observes these guidelines (*sharīʿa*) for his/her self-control then he/she would be able to act exemplarily, sincerely, and selflessly for the benefit of humanity. This would mean, that he/she "gives his/her life to the Truth." Qurʾān and Sunna provide the resources for these guidelines, but choosing to observe them is a voluntary and a self-responsible act. According to Baba Mondi, the human being is totally free. If a human being chooses to follow the rules – which are according to a high level of "logic" and with the purpose of universal human benefit – then he/she "has to respect them." Consequently, he/she is totally responsible for him-/herself and nobody else. Simultaneously, one has to accept diversity. For Baba Mondi "all human beings are equal before God," therefore, no "prioritized race" – or the like – exists because "we all are part of God." Those who "prioritise themselves, feel themselves as being above others, they are making the problems." To avoid such self-centred behaviour – which Baba Mondi attributes especially to political and religious leaders – a sincere observance of the Four Gates is necessary. The ethical transformative rules of *sharīʿa* derived from the "Qurʾān are openly accessible for everyone." Realising these rules, which the *dedebaba* describes as "calm, not demanding," would correspond with the spiritual effort to calm the *nafs*: "But the human beings do not want to." Rather, they tend to lose themselves in "malicious gossip, jealousy, and defiance." If one, however, truly "makes use" of the Qurʾān and embodies its rulings, then he/she will turn away from these destructive dispositions. His/her "soul will widen," he/she will start to "work" for the benefit of others, and, in this, "give his/her life for the Truth." Baba Mondi identifies the Bektashīya as one of "four Shiʿite *ṭarīqāt*: Bektashī, Qalandarī, Niʿmatullāhī, Jellālī" and put them on one level with diverse Sunni *ṭarīqāt*, stressing, however, that especially the Bektashīs would "accept all human beings independently of their religion, nation boarder, colour, race, politics, [and gender]".[97]

In order to challenge the exclusionary narratives of the NU manifestos toward Shiʿite voices for the establishment of a *Humanitarian Islam*, the

96 Interview: Baba Mondi 2018.

97 Interview: Baba Mondi 2018.

perspectives of a Shiʿite Sufi from Iran will be added to Baba Mondi's self-claimed Shiʿite perspective.

Mītrā Asadī is a Sufi teacher living in Shiraz who is loosely affiliated with the Niʿmatullāhī-*ṭarīqa* (Munawwar-ʿAlī-Shāhī/Dhul-Riyāsatayn branch). She does not see herself as being completely part of the *ṭarīqa.* Rather, she understands the Niʿmatullāhīya *ṭarīqa* as a "highly important" infrastructure for the spiritual praxis or *dhikr*. On a more abstract level, *ṭarīqa* as well as *sharīʿa*, for her, are parts of the Sufi development toward reaching "essential truth" (*ḥaqīqa*). Different to Baba Mondi's presentation, Mītrā Asadī understands *sharīʿa* and *ṭarīqa* as phases which are dissolving when one has reached *ḥaqīqa.* One, however, needs to go back to them when one has left this "summit of truth" where there is "no self, nor ego, no right, nor wrong, where everything is God." For Mītrā Asadī, *sharīʿa* and *ṭarīqa* are "long paths" leading to *ḥaqīqa*. However, some human beings, if they are Sufi or not, Muslim or not, may be granted the possibility to "directly reach *ḥaqīqa* and perfection," "without going these long paths." These people are "absorbed (*majdhūb*) in God" which is happening without their doing though. *Sharīʿa* and *ṭarīqa* are, however, helpful ways or methods one can choose to approach *ḥaqīqa*.[98]

Subsequently, Mītrā Asadī explains *sharīʿa* as a set of moral-social rules precipitating an ordered and harmonious society. These rulings are a necessary frame of orientation and code of good praxis which must be followed as long as one has not transcended his/her "human I." If a person becomes "empty of his/her self," his/her "soul (*rūḥ*) is on the way to searching for God," and when "Creator and creation meet," then also the *sharīʿa*-rulings would not be necessary anymore.[99] The possibility of supra-real experiences, Mītrā Asadī sees manifested in the first part of the Islamic declaration of faith *lā ilāha illa llāh* (lit.: there is no god but God), interpreting it as: "there is nothing (*hīč*) but God." Therefore, "everything is God: love, light, beauty, joy, sadness, darkness, death, life, you, I, and all other creatures." If the Sufi perceives existences from this perspective of essential truth (*ḥaqīqa*), which one can reach through the annihilation (*fanāʾ*) of the I, then he/she will recognise that "all human beings manifest God in themselves; and further, that all human beings worship God's existence (*wujūd*) in different forms" (cf. Qurʾān 17:44, 22:18).[100] According to Mītrā Asadī, it is an essential human need to approach the "divine truth (*al-ḥaqq*)" through "praying," which is as essential as "breathing." This "praying"

98 Interview: Mītrā Asadī 2016.

99 On the implications of her interpretation of transcending *sharīʿa*-rulings regarding gender, see Hentschel 2023b.

100 Cf. Qurʾān 17:44, 22:18.

is the striving for truth and manifests itself in many different forms: "according to time and region" there are different religions or worldviews. For Mītrā Asadī, Sufism is a possibility – through applying the Qurʾān to one's being – to harmonise oneself with this universal perspective. Then, the Sufi will realise that there are "so many paths as there are human beings, who are walking this path of truth and love, at any time and any place".[101]

3.4 *The Realisation of raḥma as the Trajectory of sharīʿa*

All the Sufis of the sample propagate some kind of universalism and pluralism as an ideal of inter-religious interaction.[102] Mostly, these perspectives are formulated alongside the concept of divine mercy (*raḥma*). Husamuddin Meyer, a German Naqshbandī-Haqqānī Sufi and pastoral care worker in prisons, defines *raḥma* as the focal point of the "major themes of the Qurʾān." As other Sufis, Husamuddin Meyer argues for the centrality of *raḥma* with the starting formula of all *sūras*, but one, the *basmala: bi-smi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm* – "in the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy".[103] Further, Meyer cites Qurʾān 7:156 *raḥmatī wasiʿat kulla shay'* – "My mercy embraces all things";[104] and 21:107 *wa-mā arsalnāka illā raḥmatan li-l-ʿālamīn* – "It was only as a mercy that We sent you [Prophet] to all people".[105] For Husamuddin Meyer, the intense engagement with the Qurʾān is a way to experiencing and realising *raḥma*. For this, one needs to be aware that one walks on a "way toward fresh water," explaining the etymology of *sharīʿa*. To Husamuddin Meyer, *sharīʿa* is a "complex of directives and handrails along which one must feel one's way within this world, so that one does not suffer bigger damage." Punishment (according to the laws of the respective society) would only be needed, to "protect the welfare of the society" and if there is no other way left when somebody "does not come to one's senses, remains greedy, and actually harms society." Ultimately, however, the aim of *sharīʿa* is to purify one's heart, and with such pure heart (*qalb salīm*) one can contribute positively to a more healthy society

101 Interview: Mītrā Asadī 2016.

102 These universalistic and pluralistic claims stand often in tension to demarcating and polemic discourses communicated by the same Sufis. For a theoretical critical discussion on Sufi universalism, pluralism, inclusivism, and supremacy, see Gartenstein/Hentschel 2023: passim.
Additionally, the interviewees communicated comparatively stronger intra-faith than inter-faith demarcations, presenting their own Sufi approach as the "purest" interpretation and realisation of Islam.

103 Transl. Abdel Haleem 2016, p. 3.

104 Transl. Abdel Haleem 2016, 105.

105 Transl. Abdel Haleem 2016, 208.

carried by solidarity, mutual acceptance, forgiving, and mercy. This would be the realisation of Qurʾānic justice.[106]

Similarly to Husamuddin Meyer, the Canadian Sufi Ibrahim Hussein – initiated in several *ṭarīqāt*: Čishtīya, Shādhilīya, Rifāʿīya, Qādirīya – perceives the Qurʾān as a carrier of *raḥma*. If one recites the Qurʾān intensively, one may gain access to this *raḥma* which then will be transmitted onto the reciter. Subsequently, the Sufi will develop a close relationship to the qualities of God as "the just Creator" and will be able to live and diffuse them. These qualities are "gentleness, grace, and mercy." As Husamuddin Meyer, and other Sufis, Ibrahim Hussein stresses that, according to the Qurʾān, the human being is created as an imperfect being, drawn to committing mistakes. A successful way to overcome this disposition would be the uncompromising orientation toward "sincerity" and – through this – toward God. If one realises that one ultimately is dependent on God, one will surrender, and in this be aware of one's mistakes. Then one may hope for divine mercy, as Ibrahim Hussein explains Qurʾān 39:53.[107] Realising *raḥma* for Ibrahim Hussein is "what the Qurʾān really teaches us." To master this "science" would be the aim of Sufism and this means actually to "being good to the complete creation of God." He states that the "essence of our religion (*dīn*) is unconditional sympathy (*raḥma*)." Every human being must be "an expansion of this unconditional sympathy." This can be reached though awareness and patience, which again would lead to universal love, justice, and tolerance. According to Ibrahim Hussein the "Qurʾān gives us all an invitation, to all of humanity, to bring about a change within ourselves." He also explains what this means for the position of Muslims toward non-Muslims:

> The Qurʾān teaches us Muslims that we have to act with non-Muslims with love and sympathy. […] The Qurʾān delivers a universal message of love and mercy. The Qurʾān says […] that we Muslims must act justly, that we have to be friendly, and generous. […] We have to perceive non-Muslims as a creation from God. And we can learn many things from God's creation. We must respect and love this creation […] and this is why the Prophet says in one Hadith: the creation of God is like the family of God.[108]

Ibrahim Hussein explains *sharīʿa* as an Islamic way of life alongside rulings derived from the Qurʾān and the Sunna. It is crucial that one embodies these rulings through performing the qualities of *raḥma* which would be the central

106 Interview: Husamuddin Meyer 2015.

107 "Say, '[God says], My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of God's mercy. God forgives all sins" (transl. Abdel Haleem 2016: 298f).

108 Interview Ibrahim Hussein 2015; cf. the Hadith on the authority of Anas in Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ 3:1392.

objective of the revelation. Ibrahim Hussein argues that "if you fail to live the Qurʾān, then you will fail to live unconditional sympathy. […] If you fail to live love, if you fail to live peace, then there is no *sharīʿa* in you." Ibrahim Hussein further stresses that *sharīʿa* is not a canon of law that "a few men have put together a few hundred years before." Rather sharīʿa is a universal principle of "humanity, it is the essence of humanity. *Sharīʿa* is good conduct, is wisdom, is peace, is love, and sympathy."[109]

The Sufi teacher Oruç Güvenç equally argues that there is an interaction between living the qualities of *raḥma* and, through this, the possibility of receiving these qualities from God's grace. Rahmi Oruç Güvenç (d. 2017) was initiated in a number of *ṭarīqāt* like the Mevlevīya, Bektashīya, Qādirīya, Rifāʿīya, ʿUshshakīya, Saʿdīya, and others. Primarily based in Istanbul, Turkey, Oruç Güvenç had pupils in Europe and globally facilitated his Sufi teaching through his music, which he understood as a universal language. According to Oruç Güvenç, cultivating an attitude of "respect for the other, patience, tolerance, sharing, and sympathy" are the human prerequisites for achieving God's mercy (*raḥma*). The task would be to subsequently being able to realise and distribute this mercy to the world. However, Oruç Güvenç stresses that one can only manifest *raḥma* through a complete change of lifestyle. Referring to Qurʾān 4:32 he explains: "God tells us, that if you are totally sincere and honest in following what you have learned, God will give you something different. This is why God wants that, if somebody has learned something, he/she not only understands it theoretically but indeed practices it."[110] For such transformed lifestyle, there are "principals of correct behaviour" which are "not only religious but humanitarian." These would be the guidelines through which "people can live together in harmony." In consequence, Oruç Güvenç defines the purposes of *sharīʿa* as follows:

> This is the basis: the respect for the reason of the other; and the correct and gentle behaviour with the other. [It demands] to help the other, to share one's qualities with others, to control aggression, anger, and hate. To achieve everything, [means to] live a high quality [of spiritual-ethical conduct]. [For this], it is important that our *nafs* is in resonance with our soul (*rūḥ*). When *nafs* reaches *rūḥ*, then the soul is with God (*ruh bende Allāh*) […]. This is possible; the necessary start for it is to live a humanitarian life. For this behaviour, mercy/sympathy is crucial, as mercy is contrary to egoism.[111]

109 Interview: Ibrahim Hussein 2015.

110 Qurʾān 4:32.

111 Interview: Oruç Güvenç 2016.

In concluding this presentation on contemporary Sufi approaches to *sharīʿa* and *raḥma*, let us return to Sīdī Muḥammad. According to his readings of the Qurʾān, every human being "carries God's light" in him/her. This light is what God has breathed with "His spirit into the clay," when he created the human being.[112] Subsequently, Sīdī Muḥammad asks: "what is this behaviour," when one is harming another person and therefore damaging "God's gift?" The Shādhilī-*shaykh* further explains, that in the *sharīʿa*, God would forbid to kill. This command would essentially result from God being "*al-Raḥmān, al-Raḥīm.*" Therefore, if one is genuine in applying the Qurʾān to one's life, one would recognise the absolute centrality of *raḥma*. This would make it impossible to harm any other human being who will then be truly recognised as being "your brother, your sister." Sīdī Muḥammad adds that "all human beings are created by God: and they are beautiful and good. […] One must not say that anyone is not good." Reflecting on those *sharīʿa*-interpretations that would indicate that "a Muslim must not harm [only] another Muslim," Sīdī Muḥammad clarifies that, from a Sufi perspective – and Sufism for him means the comprehensive realisation of the Qurʾān –, one would "recognise [that this would actually mean] not to harm any human being." Sufism, therefore, is the embodiment of *raḥma* with all its universal socioreligious implications:

> [The Sufi] loves human beings without differentiations and limitations. Sufism means unconditional love. The Sufi perceives the human being, and not his/her religious affiliation. *Tawba* [return, repentance] means not to condemn, and to recognise that all human beings are created by God and that God has created the human being in the best form: *la-qad khalaqnā l-insāna fī aḥsān taqwīm.* One must not judge: if rich or poor, if man or woman, one must not talk badly about somebody else; only cultivated and polite.[113]

According to Sīdī Muḥammad, the human capacities must be developed alongside "giving, contributing, and the limits of remaining pure." Subsequently, one will be enabled to "act in truth" (*ʿamal al-ḥaqīqa*) which means to Sīdī Muḥammad the "very deep interacting with each other, with no differentiation." In such sincere and committed behaviour, the Sufi would realise the Prophetic example of being sent as a mercy to all creation.[114] Consequently, the Qurʾān would teach "how to behave with your brother-human-being and that he/she [essentially] is not different from the rest of humanity." The Sufi should therefore strive for becoming the "child of his/her moment" (*ibn al-waqt*), to

112 Cf. Qurʾān 15:29, 32:9, 38:72.

113 Interview: Sīdī Muḥammad 2015, cites Qurʾān 95:4.

114 Cf. Qurʾān 21:107.

be in full consciousness of God in any moment, and to distribute God's *raḥma* to the other human beings, in caring and providing for others in the best way possible.[115]

4 Conclusion

This paper contains two lines of argumentation. Firstly, it critically examines the tenets of the NU manifestos for realising the vision of *Humanitarian Islam* which are, in fact, partly in contradiction to their own pluralistic outlook. Secondly, two core elements of the *Humanitarian Islam* objectives – *sharīʿa* and *raḥma* – are discussed alongside interpretations by present-day Sufi leaders, representing diverse teaching and cultural backgrounds. These interpretations carry the potential to contribute to the vision for a *Humanitarian Islam* in a more nuanced and differentiated way.

Summarising the first part, Islam has to be understood as a complex field of interrelating and multidimensional dynamics. Simplifications, dichotomic categorisations, and generalisations are not applicable. Still, they are not only perpetuated by most international media and political discourses but also in the NU manifestos. Therefore, this article provided a deconstructing analysis of the field of "Sufism and politicised Islam." In presenting itself as representative of a specific kind of Sufism and moderate Sunni Islam, the NU demarcates itself against a stagnated and politicised "Islamic orthodoxy." The manifestos do not call this "Salafism," but their polemical demarcation resembles those discourses which present "Salafism" as an "ultra-conservative, extremist, and politicized Islam." Further, this imaginary is presented as a counterpart to an equally imagined "liberal, pluralistic Sufism." "Sufism" and "Salafism" are, however, diverse and plural entities which partly intersect each other. Neither holds a specific and inherently political approach or claim necessarily, but both have strong political dimensions or may be politically exploited, internally as well as externally.

Further, and as argued in the second part of the paper, it is often the Sufis who are in fact the representatives of the multiple manifestations of "Islamic orthodoxies." With different focuses, the Sufis, who have been interviewed, claim to follow the "correct" interpretation of *sharīʿa*, which they argue has been handed down to them from their spiritual ancestors, back to the Prophet Muḥammad. With the conviction of being the authentic interpreters of the Qurʾān and the Sunna, the Sufi interviewees critically reflect on the dynamic

115 Interview Sīdī Muḥammad 2015.

tension between the primary sources' historicity and relevance for present-day socioreligious challenges. *Sharīʿa*, therefore, is not a code of law formulated in the 7th century CE valid for all times, but a universal, dynamic spiritual-ethical frame of reference to act "correctly" within a given society. It is not in the scope of this paper to scrutinise the actual socio-political positions and activities of the interviewed Sufis though. Questions regarding politics were often not answered in the interviews. Rather, the Sufis explained the universal spiritual and societal implications of their Qurʾān readings and *sharīʿa* interpretations as providing a guideline for good conduct.

The Sufis presented here – Sīdī Muḥammad (Shādhilīya, Israel and Palestine), Muḥammad al-Dharqāwī (Dharqāwīya, Morocco), Raḍīya al-ʿAlāwī (ʿAlāwīya–Dharqāwīya–Shādhilīya, Morocco), Basit Khan (no specific *ṭarīqa*, India), Baba Mondi (Bektashīya, Albania), Mītrā Asadī (partly Niʿmatullāhīya, Iran), Husamuddin Meyer (Naqshbandīya-Haqqānīya, Germany), Ibrahim Hussein (Čishtīya/Shādhilīya/Rifāʿīya/Qādirīya, Canada), and Oruç Güvenç (Mevlevīya/Bektashīya/Qādirīya/Rifāʿīya/ʿUshshakīya/Saʿdīya et al., Turkey) – argue, with different emphases, that an embodiment of the Qurʾān through the comprehensive application of its guidelines (*sharīʿa*) would lead to a realisation of *raḥma*. With the internalised basis of *raḥma*, the Sufi can and should contribute to an optimised and harmonious global, diverse society. The performative cultivation of *raḥma*, they believe, has the potential to act as an effective remedy against various socioreligious encroachments, inter-faith conflicts, and violence.

All the Sufis of the sample argue that personal, spiritual experience is not sufficient to reach divine truth (*ḥaqīqa*); rather the transformation of one's whole behaviour is necessary, which can only be achieved if one prioritises *raḥma* in one's interactions with others. These presentations of *raḥma* do stand in some tension to narratives by the same Sufis in which they communicate polemics and demarcations against others, in other places of the interviews. These inconsistencies, which partly mirror the inconsistencies of the NU manifestos, have to be examined elsewhere. Likewise, the actual implementations of the Sufi claims of realising *raḥma* in their actual lives would need a more thorough observation.

At this place, the discussion is limited to the Sufis' understandings of *sharīʿa*, as discussed above. It can be concluded that – in contrast to the NU's presentation – these Sufi perspectives are not new legal approaches, but lived and continuous adaptions of handed down traditions. These Sufi interpretations are in line with the fundamental arguments of *Humanitarian Islam* as an approach to the universal welfare of humanity through applying the "real" purposes of *sharīʿa*. For these Sufis, *sharīʿa* is not a rigid system of laws and

rules, which has to be imposed on others, but rather an always changing net of guidelines for an individual spiritual transformation which would enable a high standard of ethical conduct. Through the embodiment of *sharīʿa*, *raḥma* would manifest itself in the purified Sufi who, then, would be able to "radiate" this quality of unconditional sympathy and empathy.

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Can Humanitarian Islam Have an Influence Beyond Indonesia?

Ahmet T. Kuru

Abstract

Functioning in Indonesia, NU is the biggest Islamic organization in the world. Although NU outstrips the Taliban and other radical groups in terms of membership, it has not been sufficiently recognized on the international stage. This chapter examines NU's reform initiative, "Humanitarian Islam," and asks whether it can be influential in other parts of the world, especially in the Middle East.

Key Words

Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama, Humanitarian Islam, Pak Yahya, reform, caliphate

1 Introduction[1]

After their return to power in Afghanistan, the Taliban are again imposing their religious ideology, with restrictions on women's rights and other repressive measures.[2] They are presenting to the world an image of Islam that is intolerant and at odds with social change. Islam, however, has multiple interpretations. A humanitarian interpretation, focusing on "rahmah," or love and compassion, has been emphasized by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which literally means "Reawakening of the Islamic Scholars." Functioning in Indonesia, NU is the biggest Islamic organization in the world, with about 90 million members and followers.[3] In terms of membership, NU hugely outstrips the Taliban – yet this face of Islam has not been sufficiently recognized on the international stage.

1 This essay is an expanded version of Kuru 2021b, which was also published in Arabic, Bosnian, French, German, Indonesian, Spanish, and Turkish.

2 Dorsey 2021.

3 Shah 2020.

NU was founded in 1926 in reaction to the Saudis' conquest of Mecca and Medina with their Wahhabi ideas.[4] NU follows mainstream Sunni Islam, while embracing Islamic spirituality and accepting Indonesia's cultural traditions.[5] In 2014, NU responded to the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and its radical ideology. In 2017, its response developed into an Islamic reform initiative that it calls "Humanitarian Islam."[6] In order to promote this reform, Yahya Cholil Staquf "Pak Yahya" – NU's general secretary and then its chairman – has visited several countries and met with religious leaders, academics, and politicians. I met with Pak Yahya during his visit to Washington DC in July 2021; our conversation inspired me to write this essay.

My recent research on Islam in Indonesia, particularly NU's Humanitarian Islam initiative, has also been motivated by the translation of my book *Islam, Authoritarianism, Underdevelopment: A Global and Historical Comparison* into Indonesian.[7] My book has been reviewed by eminent Indonesian intellectuals including some NU-affiliates and the late Ahmad Syafii Maarif, the former leader of Muhammadiyah.[8] My research has focused on two main questions: What is the content of NU's Humanitarian Islam initiative? Can this initiative have any practical results in Indonesia and abroad?

2 Caliphate, Islamic Law, and Non-Muslims

During the past eight years, Pak Yahya has organized several meetings of NU's Islamic scholars. These meetings resulted in public declarations for reforming Islamic thought on controversial issues, including the idea of caliphate, the status of Islamic law, and Muslims' relations with non-Muslims.[9]

First of all, NU declarations reject the notion of a global caliphate, or a political entity that would unite all Muslims. The concept of a caliphate has been accepted by both mainstream Islamic scholars, such as those in Egypt's Al-Azhar and radical groups, such as al-Qaeda and ISIS. In 2014, over a hundred scholars from different countries signed an open letter to ISIS's leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The scholars who led this intervention include Abdullah bin Bayyah, Hamza Yusuf, and Ali Gomaa. The letter states the following about the caliphate: "There is agreement (ittifaq) among scholars that a caliphate

4 Staquf 2021a.
5 Saenong 2021.
6 Baytarrahmah: Humanitarian Islam; Shah and Dinham 2020.
7 Kuru 2019 (Indonesian translation 2020).
8 Maarif 2020.
9 Johnson and Taylor 2021; Staquf 2021b.

is an obligation upon the Ummah. The Ummah has lacked a caliphate since 1924 CE. However, a new caliphate requires consensus from Muslims."[10] So these established ulema agree with ISIS that creating a caliphate is a religious duty on Muslims. Their disagreement is that ISIS's caliphate is not based on consensus. This highlights the importance of NU's rejection of the idea of the caliphate.

Moreover, NU declarations emphasize the legitimacy of modern states' constitutional and legal systems, and thus reject the idea that it is a religious obligation to establish a state based on Islamic law. Additionally, NU declarations stress the importance of equal citizenship by refusing to make a distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims as legal categories. They also call for a deeper cooperation among Muslims, Christians and followers of other religions to promote world peace. NU has taken practical steps for realizing that aim. To promote intercultural solidarity and respect, it has established a working relationship with the World Evangelical Alliance, which claims to represent 600 million Protestants. To better understand the importance of NU's perspective and its limits requires an examination of the Indonesian context.

3 Indonesia's Tolerant Islam

Out of 50 Muslim-majority countries in the world, only five are democracies.[11] Indonesia is notable for not only being one of these five democracies, but also having the largest Muslim population – 88% of its population of 270 million are Muslim. Indonesia's foundational credo, Pancasila, means "five principles" and basically refers to the belief in God, humanitarianism, Indonesia's national unity, democracy, and social justice. Both NU and Muhammadiyah – Indonesia's second-biggest Islamic organization – have been respectful of these principles. These two organizations often cooperate against radical Islamist groups.[12]

Robert Hefner, a leading American scholar on Indonesia, documents how NU and Muhammadiyah made important contributions to the country's democratization in the late 1990s.[13] During this process, the leader of NU, Abdurrahman Wahid, became Indonesia's first democratically elected president in 1999. Wahid, who died in 2009, left a religious legacy, too. During my

10 See Online at: Open Letter to Al-Baghdadi.
11 Kuru 2021a.
12 Taylor 2011.
13 Hefner 2020.

conversations, NU representatives, such as Pak Yahya and Holland Taylor, repeatedly referred to Wahid's reformist ideas as a main source of inspiration for Humanitarian Islam.

4 Indonesia's Intolerant Islam

Not all Islamic theories and practices in Indonesia are tolerant toward diversity. The country's Aceh province has enforced certain rules of Islamic criminal law, including the punishment of caning for those who sell or drink alcohol. Another example of religious and political intolerance is Indonesia's blasphemy law, which resulted in the 20-month imprisonment of the capital city Jakarta's Chinese Christian governor, Basuki Purnama in 2017–2018, for a statement about a verse in the Quran.[14]

In January 2021, the story of a Christian female student being pressured by the school principal to wear a Muslim headscarf went viral on Facebook. In response, three cabinet ministers signed a joint decree banning the imposition of headscarves and other religious attires on students in public school. One of the signatories of this liberal decree was the minister of religious affairs, Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, a leading NU member and the younger brother of Pak Yahya.[15] Few months later, however, Indonesian Supreme Court revoked the decree and made the imposition of headscarves on students by school administrators or other officials possible again.[16]

In short, there is a tug-of-war between intolerant and tolerant interpretations of Islam in Indonesia. Even within NU, there exist disagreements between conservatives and reformists. Hence: the Humanitarian Islam movement is crucial to promote tolerance in Indonesia. But can it have an effect abroad, especially in the Middle East?

5 Influencing the Middle East

This reform movement's reception in the Middle East, the historical center of Islam, is important if it is to have a global impact. Humanitarian Islam has been mostly ignored by scholars and governments of such Middle Eastern countries as Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and UAE, who generally see

14 Hefner 2021.
15 Marshall 2021.
16 Ibrahim 2021.

it as a competitor of their own attempts to influence the Muslim world. As a nongovernmental initiative, Humanitarian Islam is different from Middle Eastern efforts to shape the Muslim world, which are mostly government-led schemes.[17]

With its reformist emphasis, Humanitarian Islam may appeal to some young Middle Eastern Muslims who are discontent with their countries' political and conservative interpretations of Islam.[18] In order to reach a Middle Eastern audience, the Humanitarian Islam movement has launched an Arabic-language version of its English website.[19] Whether this Indonesian initiative can have an impact in the Middle East and become a truly global movement for Islamic reform remains to be seen.

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17 Dorsey 2020.

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Islamic Heritage in Indonesia

A Collection of Texts

Rüdiger Lohlker

Abstract

Functioning in Indonesia, NU is the biggest Islamic organization in the world. Although NU outstrips the Taliban and other radical groups in terms of membership, it has not been sufficiently recognized on the international stage. This chapter examines NU's reform initiative, "Humanitarian Islam," and asks whether it can be influential in other parts of the world, especially in the Middle East.

Key Words

Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama, Humanitarian Islam, Pak Yahya, reform, caliphate

1 Introduction

Recent scholarship has focussed on several new phenomena in Indonesian Islam as "challenges to traditional religious authority"[1] due to the "increasing reliance of Muslims when practising their faith"[2] on the platforms of the Internet.[3] This 'new santri' and the medialization of religious communication in Indonesia[4] (and the non-religious online communication) need more research. A new volume published in 2022 may be read as an answer by scholars from a Nahdlatul Ulama context to these challenges.

Nahdhlatul Ulama (NU) is the world's largest Muslim organization[5] to a large extent based in the culture of *pesantren* (cf. below). At the same time it

1 Saat/Burhani 2020.

2 Slama 2018, p. 1.

3 For a debate in Western Sumatra among Islamic scholars and the role of social media cf. Ridwan 2019.

4 Alatas 20222.

5 Bush 2009; Ismail 2011; Feillard 2013; Niam 2017.

appears to be, esp., in the West[6] a part of a forgotten country far away from the West, "below the wind." For the Arab, Iranian, or Turkish world it is acknowledged that Indonesia is part of the Islamic world but not accepted as a genuine part of it.

The new and underresearched concept of *Humanitarian Islam* promoted by an influential part of NU[7] is a challenge to the field of Islamic discussion, the positions emerging from the Arab world, other parts of the Islamic world regarding themselves as the "orthodox" form of Islam, and the perception of Islam by 'the West'. The collection studied here allow for insights into the ideas behind this new concept.

The collection analyzed here consists of text, most of them part of the *kitab kuning*[8] used in the curriculum of Indonesian *pesantren*, Islamic boarding schools. A complete list of the works included in the collection allows for insights into the epistemic field circumscribed by the texts of the collection:

1) *Tanbīh al-māshī al-mansūb ilā tarīq al-Qushāshī* by ʿAbd al-Raʾūf ibn ʿAlī al-Fansūrī al-Sinkīlī al-Āshī (1693 CE/1105h), a treatise on Sufism (*tasawwuf*).
2) *Masʾala al-Qibla fi 'l-Batāwī* by Muhammad Arshad al-Banjārī (d. 1812 CE/1227h), a special treatise on a problem related to the direction of prayer (*qibla*).
3) *Kifāyat al-mubtadi'* by Muhammad ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Qudsī al-Jāwī (d. 1876 CE/1293 AH), a treatise on the belief in one God (*tawhīd*).
4) *al-ʿIqd al-thamīn Sharh al-Fath al-mubīn fī manzūma al-sittīn* by Muhammad Nawawī al-Bantanī (d. 1897 CE/1314 AH), a commentary on a poem discussing 60 questions concerning Islamic doctrine (*ʿaqīda*) and Shafiʿi law (*fiqh*).[9]
5) *al-Muqaddima wa-tafsīr sūrat al-Fātiha* part of *Fayd al-rahmān fī tarjumān tafsīr al-malik al diyān* by Muḥammad Sālih Dārāt al-Samarānī (d. 1903 CE/1321 AH), part of a Qur'anic commentary.
6) *al-Matn al-sharīf al-mulaqqab biʿl-Fath al-latīf* by Muhammad Khalīl al-Bangkalānī (d. 1925 CE/1343 'AH) on Shafiʿite law (*fiqh*).

6 We are referring to 'the West' as intersecting imaginaries: 1) the imagined idea of a Western community that emerged in Western Europe and Northern America and some other countries like Australia, New Zealand, Japan, etc., 2) the idea of this community being the counterpart of all the non-Western communities in many parts of the world.

7 Cf. this volume for a first attempt to analyze and present this concept.

8 van Bruinessen 1990, Lohlker 2022.

9 The preeminence of Shafiite law is clearly stated in this commentary: "the precious madhhab of the Shafiites" (Muṣṭafā et al. 2022, p. 204).

7) *Taʿlīqāt ʿalā Risāla Ahmad Zaynī Dahlān fī ʿilm al-istiʿārāt* by Ahmad Nahrāwī al-Banūmāsī (d. 1926 CE/1345 AH).
8) *Risāla fī ʿilm al-tasawwuf* by Muḥammad Mukhtār ibn ʿAtārid al-Būghūrī (d. 1930 CE/1349 AH) part of *Kifāyat al-mubtadiʾīn fī ʿibāda rabb al-ʿālamīn* on Sufism.
9) *Madkhal al-wusūl li-maʿrifa ʿilm al-usūl* by Muhsin ibn ʿAlī al-Musāwī al-Filimbānī (d. 1935 CE/1354 AH) on methodology of Islamic law.
10) *Nazm al-Risāla al-Samarqandiyya* by Ahmad Khalīl ibn Hārūn al-Sārānī al-Rambānī (d. 1939 CE/1358 AH), a popular versified[10] version of a treatise on Arabic literary theory and rhetoric.
11) *Arbaʿūna ḥadīthᵃⁿ tataʿallaq bi-mabādiʾ jamʿiyyat Nahdat al-ʿulamāʾ* by Muḥammad Hāshim Ashʿarī al-Jūmbānī (d. 1947 CE/1366 AH), a collection of Hadiths relevant for NU.

Looking at these works from a linguistic point of view, the majority are written in Arabic (8). Others are written in Javanese (1), Arabic and Madurese (1), and Sundanese (1). Many of the texts collected have been and are part of the curriculum of *pesantren*.

The fields covered are Hadith, Arabic language, Sufism, Shafiʿite law, Qur'anic exegesis, Islamic doctrine, theology, and applied law. The texts are written by authors living in the 19th and 20th century CE, one author lived in the 17th century CE.

2 Excursus: Pesantren

Pesantren are an essential part of Indonesian Islam. Due to the diversity and the wide geographical distribution general assessments are difficult.

> One of the most striking differences between the diffusion of Islam in Southeast Asia as compared with the Middle East and South Asia was that institution of higher Islamic learning like the madrasa arrived not *with*, but centuries *after* Southeast Asia's first wave of Islamization from the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries [...]. Boarding schools for the study of the Islamic sciences were established in large numbers across the central archipelago only from the mid-nineteenth-century onward [...], and they soon played a major role in the promotion of a more shariah-minded Islam.[11]

10 Versified versions of texts have been used to facilitate memorization all over the Islamic world, e.g., in law, navigation, and medicine. Cf. Lohlker 2003; van Bruinessen 1990, p. 235.

11 Hefner 2018, p. 218.

A recent study (Assa'idi 2021) states:

> Pesantren (Islamic Boarding Schools[, IBS]) in Indonesia started as a traditional education system based on a mosque or boarding school, but is now growing into a modern institution that offers education at all levels, including primary, junior high, high school, and tertiary education. According to the Ministry of Religion, there 28,194 IBSs in 2020, with a total of 5 million students. There are 21,263 IBS in Java [...] with 1.5 Million students (Ministry of Religion 2020). The emergence of pesantren indicates a further expansion of Islamic study groups located in mosques or houses of *kyai*.[12]

A *kyai* is an Islamic scholar and may be the leader of a *pesantren*. The orientation of the school depends on the views of its leader and may be highly diverse ranging from a modernizing attitude to more conservative ones. There is a lack of empirical research on the pesantren. A cursory overview of existing *pesantren* gives the impression that the staff is recruited from former students of the school.

The collection of texts may be read as a way to establish a canon of Islamic knowledge applicable in Islamic schools and study circles. Thus, the collection are an attempt to homogenize Islamic knowledge disseminated through *pesantren*.

3 Field of Islamic Discussion

This article, thus, analyzes the collection of texts discussed here as an attempt to reconfigure the field of contemporary Islamic discussion in Indonesia and beyond. This field can be understood as a specific kind of intellectual field. Following the approach of Bourdieu we may say:

> The issue of the limits of a field is present in every field. [...] if we think of the intellectual world in terms of a field, we immediately realise that one of the fundamental problems of this field will be the struggle to know who is part of it. I might even say that one of the properties by which we might best characterise the position occupied by an intellectual in the intellectual field will be the stance they adopt over the criteria for inclusion in the intellectual field. [...] When we think in terms of fields we imply that every field is concerned with the question of its boundaries. But the historical form that boundary takes in each field will vary [...].[13]

12 Assa'idi 2022, p. 426.

13 Bourdieu 2020, pp. 200–201.

The collection studied here marks an important moment in the history of Indonesian Islam and Islam in general trying to reclaim Islam from the universalist dominance of modern Islamic positions disseminated by contemporary Islamic movements emerging from the Arabic world. Thus, NU liberates the need to 'provincialise' (Mahmood Kooria) Islamic knowledge, i.e., recontextualize it in a non-Arabocentric worldview and claims the own history of Indonesian Islam back from the customary views in academic research linked to the specific Arabic worldviews.

4 Pribumisasi Islam

Theoretically speaking, the big Indonesian Islamic organizations claim for several years the creation of a new, non-restrictive *ijtihād*. The central concept underlying this idea is called "indigenization of Islam" (*pribumisasi Islam*) introduced, esp., by Abdurrahman Wahid.[14]

> [...] intended to avoid polarization between religion (and law) and Indonesian culture. This is not the place to follow the ramifications of the Islamic and non-Islamic debate on *ijtihād*. This analysis stresses the Indonesian dimension of this debate. Any inclusion of the discussion in North Africa, Southwest Asia, or South Asia would prevent a thorough understanding of the specificity of the Indonesian debate. Reconceptualizing the web of contemporary Islamic thought and practice has to avoid an inclusion of, e.g., Middle Eastern ideas that would affirm the idea of a domination of Middle Eastern ideas in the Islamic world.[15]

The Indonesian debate, esp., of the NU communities, constitutes itself against Middle Eastern domination – as said before. This concept may be understood as the natural outcome of the processes described by Mahmood Kooria developed in his book on Shāfiʿī and the Indian Ocean. He stresses the need to "provincialize" Islam as "imperative in examining the contexts of Islam in its long history."[16] Later on he writes:

> The regional socio-political strata influence the making of a distinctive identity for the fuqahāʾ estate and the form of what became 'Islamic law'. With intentional or unintentional interruptions, the polity and community of believers circulated around the individuals and institution of a local estate in their personal and public religious, legal and cultural lives. Depending on an 'uncontrollable' textual tradition the fuqahāʾ advocated orthodoxy around the divine law which

14 Wahid 1999, 2007 and 2019; Fitriah 2013; Hastriana 2013.

15 Lohlker 2021, p. 191.

16 Kooria 2022, p. 19.

> was circulated for centuries through the local and broader intellectual spectra of Islam. This regionality is part of the historical contextualization pertinent to any school of thought.[17]

One text may be helpful to understand the process of 'provincialization' and indigenization. Kooria started part of his discussion with the commentary *Fath al-muʿīn* by the South Indian scholar Zayn al-dīn al-Malaybārī (fl. 16th century CE), one of the most circulated intermediate textbooks"[18] in South and Southeast Asia – and in Cairo, Mecca, and Medina. Kooria situates the *Fatḥ* in a network of texts. Among them four commentaries of the *Fath al-muʿīn*. We will look into the commentary *Nihāyat al-zayn* of Nawawī al-Bantanī (d. 1897 CE; cf. above), a scholar from Southeast Asia who was educated in the archipelago then pursued a career in Mecca before returning to Southeast Asia.

> The *Nihāya* was written by a scholar of Javanese origin and the *Iʿāna*[, another commentary,] is by an Egyptian, but both authors were based in Mecca. Both texts reflect developments in the traditional intellectual realms of their time, especially the syntheses of intellectual divisions and geo-legal differences within the school. It is only with a juxtaposed reading of these texts within the school.[19]

The "geo-political differences" may be read in other terms as an indicator of the indigenization of Shafi'i law in a complex process across the Indian Ocean. Following Kooria we read:

> The *Nihāya* is an idiosyncratic commentary in the sense that it was written by a Javanese scholar who primarily studies in Indonesia before he built a successful career in Mecca. A close reading of the *Iʿāna* and *Nihāya* thus demonstrate a synthesis of different regional and cultural pedigrees in the nine-teenth century Shāfiʿī cosmopolis.[20]

A close reading of the influential texts will reveal the processes of transformation and indigenization. The *Masʾala al-Qibla fi 'l-Batāwī* (cf. below) may provide another example of indigenization in the field of applied Islamic law, in this case.

This approach may be adapted to other fields of Islamic knowledge and other schools of thought. We may read it as a well-known practice available to Islamic communities adopting and reforming their ideas to a 'local estate.' A

17 Kooria 2022, pp. 380–381.
18 Kooria 2022, p. 113.
19 Kooria 2022, p. 115.
20 Kooria 2022, pp. 117–118.

less *fiqh*-centered perspective reveals other aspects of the history of the processes of indigenizing Islam in the Indonesian archipelago. Thus, we will turn to Sufism (*taṣawwuf*). The important saint of Damascus in the 12th century CE and a kind of patron saint of the city, Raslān b. Yaʿqūb b. ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Jaʿbarī al-Dimashqī (d. around 1296 CE),[21] is famous for his "mystical tract denouncing the hidden polytheism lying at the base of self-assertion and reliance on fellow-creatures and things created".[22] The *Risāla fi 'l-tawhīd* was held in high repute in the archipelago as it is documented by the number of manuscript copies in the Jakarta and Leiden libraries. Commentaries[23] well known in the Indonesian archipelago are *Fath al-rahmān* by Zakariyyāʾ al-Ansārī (d. 1520 CE)[24] in wide circulation and at least three other known commentaries, two of them also in circulation in the Indonesian archipelago. The popularity of this family of texts can be inferred by the fact that poems referring to the *Fath* are composed in the early part of the 18th century CE[25] in Cirebon[26] and in 1750 CE another text was composed by a scholar from Palembang[27] who composed a Malay commentary[28] – inspired by ideas of al-Ansārī – of an Arabic commentary on the well-known dogmatic poem called *Jawharat a-tawhīd* by al-Lāqānī (d. 1631 CE).[29] Part of this family of texts related to the *Fath* of al-Ansārī was the Malay commentary of Kemas Fakhruddin al-Falimbani (d. second half of 19th century CE)[30] on the *Risāla* of Arslan.[31]

This process of reception documents another process of indigenization; Islamic mystical and dogmatic knowledge from the Arab world are transformed into texts by local authors commented upon in, e g., Javanese and other languages of the Indonesian archipelago. It may be called *pribumisasi* avant la lettre or in Kooria's terms, a process of 'provincialization' as a process of a normal Islamic process resulting from the need to overcome the widely shared dichotomies between the 'customary' or 'local' practices and 'pure' Islam.

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21 Drewes 1977, p. 6.

22 Drewes 1977, p. 2.

23 For the importance of commentaries, supercommentaries, and other commentarial texts for the development of Islamic thought cf. Ingalls 2021 and Kooria 2022.

24 Cf. Ingalls 2021 and Zarrina Saari et al. 2020.

25 Drewes 1977, p. 52–87 with an English translation; the title is Kitab Patahulrahman.

26 A port city on the northern coast of Java.

27 A city in the Southwest of Sumatra.

28 Drewes 1977, pp. 88–105 with an English translation; the title is simply Risalah.

29 Cf. Nagel 2002, pp. 11–32.

30 Some other works are ascribed to him, some referring to Arabic texts, see online at: Infokito 2019.

31 Drewes 1977, pp. 106–175 with an English translation; the title is for this edition Kitab Mukhtasar.

> The 'pure' Islamic law has always been depicted as the one that came from the Middle East. In other words, it means the customary practices of the Middle East. Recognising this dimension in the substantive and theoretical legal corpus is to evaluate regional norms in what is generally perceived as Islamic law, and to appreciate the Islamic legal cultures of the Muslims from distant regions with a closer attention to their local contexts in which law and legal texts were produced, circulated and survived.[32]

Thus, the collection of texts studied here as an indicator of the growing self-confidence of Muslims beyond the Southwest Asian and North African context and as an indicator of the ongoing need to understand Islam in the changed circumstances to understand Islam and reform if it is needed.

5 Discussing the Collection

A closer look at the texts collected shows a specific "school of thought" (Kooria) guiding the readers of the collection. We will turn after to a close reading of some of the texts mentioned above to give some insights! Since these texts are not well-known we will present a descriptive analysis stressing the aspects that are in the focus of the compilers of the collection.

6 Tanbīh al-māshī al-mansūb ilā tarīq al-Qushāshī

Ahmad al-Qushāshī (d. 1661 CE) was the teacher of Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī (d. 1690 CE) and a disciple, son-in-law, and successor of Ahmad al-Shinnāwī (d. 1619 CE). All three were outspoken followers of the doctrine of the 'Oneness of Being' (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) and linked to the South Asian Sufi order of the Shattariyya.[33] Al-Qushāshī played an important role in the conflict over some ideas of the Ahmad Sirhindī introduced by some of his disciples from South Asia.[34] Through their wide network of students, they were part of the Southeast Asian universe of Islamic knowledge.[35] The *Tanbīh al-māshī* by al-Qushāshī was studied as part of the Shattariyya heritage in the Indonesian archipelago.[36]

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32 Kooria 2022, p. 383.

33 El-Rouayheb 2006.

34 El-Rouayheb 2015, pp. 260–261.

35 E.g., the anonymous Indonesian Sullam al-mustafidīn is a commentary on some commentaries referring to a creed composed in verse by Aḥmad al-Qushāshī (cf. Todd 1975).

36 Fathurahman 2008; cf. Sunarwoto 2009.

Since al-Qushāshī was raised in Medina, traveling then for studies to Yemen with his father, then to Mecca before spending the rest of his life in Medina he is a paradigmatic case of a traveling scholar being part of a scholarly network[37] that was extended to Southeast Asia (cf. below). Al-Qushāshī was a prolific writer; up to 50 works were ascribed to him. He wrote on *tasawwuf*, Hadith, *fiqh*, *usūl al-fiqh* and *tafsīr*,[38] Very popular was the book discussed here, *Tanbīh al-māshī*. It "became the Sufi philosophical manual of the Shattari fraternity in the Malay world."[39]

The codicil of the *ʿUmdat al-muhtājīn*, a work of the Islamic scholar who dominated the religious life of the Sultanate of Aceh in the latter half of the seventeenth century and student of Aḥmad al-Qushāshī and Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī, ʿAbd al-Raʾūf al-Singkilī (d. 1693 CE), gives some hints on the needs urging scholar to travel across the Indian Ocean and study in Arabia:

> The need to study for a recognised qualification, not merely undertake studies for personal fulfilment. Ahmad al-Qushāshī initiated ʿAbd al-Raʿuf into the mystical path, and after the former's death Ibrahim al-Kurani completed ʿAbd al-Raʿuf's instruction, and awarded him the licence which gave him authority to propagate the mystical teachings he had acquired. The need to be eclectic in undertaking the study of Sufism.[40]

This remark hints at the fact that sometimes it is difficult to separate the works of al-Qushāshī from those by Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī. The latter took over the task of teaching and writing towards the end of al-Qushāshī's life.

Aḥmad al-Qushāshī was an 'organic' part of the networks of Islamic scholars across the Indian Ocean and through his students (and the students of his students) had a lasting impact on the development of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago. Since the intellectual genealogy of al-Qushāshī was not delineated yet a short look at the Sufi aspect may be helpful for our reflection. The genealogy can be taken from his *al-Simt al-majīd*[41] and gives a good idea how deeply imbued in Sufi circles he was.[42]

A comprehensive study of al-Qushāshī is still needed. We will now turn to the text edited in the collection discussed here: *Tanbīh al-māshī al-mansūb ilā tarīq al-Qushāshī*. The Tanbīh is a very concise text teaching the novices on the Sufi path, the prayers, and ideas to be followed. The core idea making this text

37 Azra 2004, pp. 16–18 and passim.
38 Cf. Khairul Umam 2016, pp. 21–25.
39 Khairul Umam 2016, p. 17.
40 Riddell 2001, p. 127.
41 On this work cf. Chih 2010.
42 Khairul Umam 2016, p. 18.

attractive to modern scholars and activists of Nahdlatul Ulama in contemporary Indonesia is the idea of mercy (*rahma*). 'Al-Qushāshī' stressed that mercy (*rahma*) should be the guideline of a novice in the veneration of the Prophet Muhammad. He says:

O novice (*murīd*), know that perfection (*kamāl*) is following the messenger of God – God may bless him and grant him salvation – and he is the blessing for all mankind (*ʿālamīn*) as He says: 'And We sent thee not, save as a mercy unto the worlds.' (21, *al-anbiyāʾ*, 103). He is merciful upon all people, be they small or big. The Prophet – God may bless him and grant him salvation – said: 'God is not merciful to whom who is not merciful towards the people.'[43] And the Prophet used to say: 'Help your brother, be he unjust (*zālim*) or be he unjustly treated (*mazlūm*).' One man asked: 'O messenger of God, helping the unjustly treated [is morally accepted]. But helping the unjust: How do we do it?' He answered: 'Stop him from acting unjustly. That is your help for him.'"[44] (Muṣṭafā et al. 2022: 26–27)

These moral guidelines forming the central conviction of NU have to be supplemented by practical piety. A practical approach to piety including the idea of mercy (*rahma*) is shown in paragraph 60 of the *Tanbīh* where al-Qushāshī says:

> Take up, o novice (*murīd*), be it only two rakʿas. If you pray more than two *rakʿa*s sit down after it. Plead for intercession (*shafāʿa*), say, "Praise the lord!" (*subhān allāh*), say, "I ask God's forgiveness!" (*astaghfir allāh*), and pray for the prophet (*tasliyya*).[45] After you have finished the prayer, be it two *rakʿa*s or more speak softly seventy times "My God." (*ilāhī*) that is what you are doing to be saved from the evil (*sūʾ*) [...] Ask for forgiveness for it by the truth [that lies] in "There is nothing to be worshipped except God. Muhammad is the messenger of God. O God pray for Muhammad and the family of Muhammad. Give blessing, peace, and prayers to all the prophets and messengers through thy mercy (*rahma*), you, the most merciful (*arham al-rāhimīn*). Then turn to the loud and silent invocation (*dhikr*) according to what has been advised to you by the master (*murshid*) following the degrees of invocation.[46]

Hence, al-Qushāshī's treatise is edited because here to convey the core idea of modern Indonesian Islamic thought is to be found that God is the most merciful.[47] We may add other utterings like "O God! The all-merciful (*rahmān*) of this world and the other. Be merciful (*irham*) on both worlds. My most merciful

43 Quotation from al-Bukhārī 2001: 1301–1302 (no. 7376).
44 Quotation from al-Bukhārī 2001: 1230 (no. 6952).
45 For the taṣliyya cf. Meier 1999.
46 Mustafā et al. 2022, pp. 35–36.
47 E.g., Apriani et al. 2018.

(*rahmānī*) are you. Be merciful (*tarḥam*) upon me! And be merciful out of your mercy!"[48] that aptly demonstrates this idea is to be found in al-Qushāshī.

As a revered traditional scholar linking the idea, we mentioned with the tradition based in the discourses at the most revered cities of the Islamic world makes him of utmost importance for the reformist ideas of NU. Other practical aspects are considered in the collection we are studying. The direction of prayer is one of these aspects.

7 Mas'ala al-Qibla fi 'l-Batāwī

Determining the direction of prayer was a crucial problem before the advent of modern mathematical and technical solutions. The methods applied in pre-modern times "provided reasonable approximations in locations close to Mecca but were quite inaccurate in faraway places like North Africa and Iran."[49] We may add, problems occurring in South Asia or Southeast Asia. Radically different methods were accepted to solve these problems providing answers to local questions and furthering the indigenization of Islam. For the Arab world, the difficulties of finding the *qibla* were discussed due to the evident difference in the alignment of mosques in North Africa for many centuries since the 12th century CE. The debate referred to several arguments from legal rulings, Hadith literature, and scientific findings.[50]

> Owing to the practical nature of the *qibla* debate, the conceptual categories under discussions may at times seem vague, but these issues were articulated with much more precision in other theoretical debates. The significance of the *qibla* debate is that precise epistemological discussions filtered down to the sensitive matter of prayer and raised, in no uncertain terms, the question of intellectual authority within, as it were, the most sacred space of Islam. Clearly, this was not an academic debate relegated to the margins of Islamic culture but a debate constitutive of the culture [...] The primary questions here are, What cultural forces provided the conditions that made such epistemological debates possible, and what was the context in which these debates emerged and were sustained.[51]

Leaving aside the historical fact that the "Arab" worldview was not as homogenous as imagined by some Arabo-centric and non-Arabic Muslims positions today, we will have to turn to Southeast Asia. Muḥammad Arshad ibn 'Abd

48 Mustafā et al. 2022, p. 34.
49 Dallal 2010, p. 1.
50 Cf. King 2004.
51 Dallal 2010, pp. 8–9.

Allāh al-Banjārī (1710–1812 CE),[52] a leading scholar of South Kalimantan, is described by Azyumardi Azra as knowledgeable in

> *ʿilm al-falak* (astronomy), a field in which he was a leading authority among Malay Indonesian scholars. With regard to his works and activities after his return to the archipelago, one might assume that Muḥammad Arshad was simply an expert in *sharīʿah* or *fiqh*, especially due to the fact that his best-known text, entitled *Sabīl al-muhtadīn*, is a fiqh book. But this does not necessarily mean that he was not learned in Sufism; it is known that he also wrote a work entitled *Kanz al-maʿrifa*, dealing with *tasawwwuf*. Thus Muḥammad Arshad was well versed in the exterior (*al-zāhir*) and interior (*al-bātin*) sciences [...] Muḥammad Arshad received the Sammāniyyah from al-Sammānī, and he is considered the scholar most responsible for the spread of the Sammāniyyah *tarīqa* in Kalimantan.[53]

Muḥammad Arshad studied for about 30 years in Mecca and five years in Medina before returning to the archipelago. Several years before his return it is said that he began to teach students in the Ḥarām Mosque of Mecca."[54] He also went to Cairo to pursue his studies before he returned to his homeland.[55]

As a specialist in *ʿilm al-falak*, applied astronomy, al-Banjārī was involved in another *qibla* debate related to a mosque in ancient Batavia. It was stated that the *qibla* of this mosque diverged by 22–25 degrees from the usual direction to the Kaaba. Al-Banjārī rearranged the *mihrāb* 24 degrees in accordance with other leading scholars responsible for the mosque. The *mihrāb* of other mosques in Batavia was corrected, too.[56]

However, internal strife occurred in Batavia. One of the local scholars asked why al-Banjārī changed the *mihrāb* although no scholar did it before him.[57] The issue was discussed before the Dutch commissioner. Al-Banjārī argument successfully based on cartographic evidence. The debate was ended without causing a split in the community of Batavia, in the spirit of mutual respect.[58] Although al-Banjārī opposed the local opinion on the *qibla* by the inhabitants of Batavia (*ahl al-Batāwiya*) he met with other Islamic scholars of Batavia and agreed on several points, not on the question of the *qibla*.[59] His opponent still

52 Cf. Mustafā et al. 2022, pp. 51–64.
53 Azra 2004, p. 118 – He was also initiated in the Shaṭṭārriyya.
54 Azra 2004, p. 118.
55 His influence in the region has been described as applied "local wisdom" (Azhari 2016).
56 Mustafā et al. 2022, pp. 54–55.
57 The traditionalist argument par excellence.
58 Mustafā et al. 2022, pp. 55–56.
59 Mustafā et al. 2022, p. 56.

upheld the idea that the initial building of the mosque was done in a pious manner.[60]

Thus, we note the local, traditional account of the *qibla* is upheld despite the criticism of an Indonesian scholar of the time who taught for a long time in the most venerated cities of Mecca and Medina and was famous as a specialist on questions of applied astronomy (*ʿilm al-falak* and *mīqāt*) presenting a different view based on astronomical and theological arguments and organized in a question-and-answer way of argumentation.[61] The questions often allow for insights into the arguments of the local scholars and, thus, into the shared views of the local population. The many quotations from works of Shafiite law on the other hand give a first-hand account of the Shafiite works circulating in the Indian Ocean.[62]

The *risāla* on the *qibla* was steeped in a deep knowledge of Islamic disciplines. Al-Banjārī who was a person dedicated to spreading his version of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago, however, refrained from imposing his views on the local population and its scholars but started a process of communal dialogue on the issues discussed. Hence, in this case, indigenization means establishing a dialogue in the Muslim community to solve pressing problems affecting core elements of the ritual practice that is agreed upon. It is a case study of the intersection of Islamic knowledge created in the Arab Peninsula and local Islamic knowledge for the common good. This may also be analyzed as a process of localization or provincialization, the term coined by Kooria. The striving for intracommunal harmony may well be illustrated by the final quotation of the *risāla* on the *qibla*: "God tasks no soul beyond its capacity." (sura 2, *al-baqara*, 286)

8 Madkhal al-wusūl ilā ʿilm al-usūl

A more theoretical approach may be considered the one followed by *Madkhal al-wusūl ilā ʿilm al-usūl* of al-Sayyid Muhsin ibn ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Musāwā Bā ʿAlawī al-Hadramī al-Filimbānī (d. 1935 CE), After studying in Mecca he traveled to the Hadramawt and then started to teach at the same *madrasa* he studied before and frequently traveled to Medina. He established his own teaching institution in Mecca together with other Indonesian

60 Mustafā et al. 2022, p. 80.
61 Mustafā et al. 2022, pp. 75–120.
62 Cf. Kooria 2022.

scholars.[63] He may be called a leading representative of the Indonesian scholars in Mecca and Medina in the first half of the 20th century before the third Saudi kingdom gained a firm hold on the teaching at Mecca and Medina.

Al-Sayyid Muhsin writes that his treatise is based on *al-Waraqāt*[64] by the eminent Shafi'i legal scholar and Ash'arite theologian[65] al-Juwaynī (d. 1085 CE).[66] Thus al-Sayyid Muhsin is linking himself to the history of Shafi'ism legitimizing his influence more than the fact of studying and teaching in Mecca and Medina.

His *Madkhal* starts with a series of definitions indicating that it is, indeed, an introductory treatise. Since it is a treatise on *usūl al-fiqh* the basic definition is the technical definition of *fiqh*, Islamic law: Knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of the Shari'atic rule (*hukm*) in a sound disciplinary way, i.e., the independent legal judgment based on certain rules (*ijtihād*).[67] The Shari'atic rule (*hukm*) is defined as the speech (*khitāb*) of God relating to the deeds of humans (*mukallafīn*).[68] As far as the notion of knowledge (*'ilm*) is concerned, for al-Sayyid Muhsin it means "the perception of what is real," e.g., understanding that man is a talking animal (*ḥayawān nātiq*),[69] the ancient Aristotelian idea. The methodology of Islamic law has for al-Sayyid Muhsin thirteen categories not to be discussed here.[70]

The claim to represent the ancient Ash'arite and Shafi'ite schools may well be seen in al-Filimbānī's reference[71] to the cardinal maxim of infallibilism for all matters outside the purview of consensus: "The *mujtahid* whose opinion is correct is rewarded twice [i.e., both for exercising his effort and for getting it right], while the *mujtahid* whose opinion is incorrect is rewarded only once [for his effort]."[72]

Although there is a reservation in the *Madkhal* as to the belief in one God (*tawhīd*). For the case of questions related to *tawhīd*, the maxim of infallibilism is not to be applied since it may lead to a negation of the relevance of the prophetic sending (*ba'th*).[73] However, fundamental flexibility is still maintained

63 Mustafā et al. 2022, pp. 403–408.
64 Cf. Hnaysh 2021.
65 Cf. Shihadeh 2012.
66 Mustafā et al. 2022, p. 409.
67 Muṣṭafā et al. 2022, p. 410.
68 Mustafā et al. 2022, p. 411.
69 Mustafā et al. 2022, p. 413.
70 Mustafā et al. 2022, p. 415.
71 Mustafā et al. 2022, p. 441.
72 Hallaq 2014: 82; cf. Zysow 2015: 261–262. al-Bukhārī 2001: 1297 (no. 7352) has "hakama al-hākim fa 'jtahada."
73 Mustafā et al. 2022, p. 441.

by the final reverence to God: "God is the only one who is right (*sawāb*)."[74] since the final paragraph is devoted to the question of which *mujtahid* is getting it right (*musīb*). Hence, we may read the *Madkhal* of al-Sayyid Muhsin as a claim to be the true follower of the tradition of the *ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamā'a* – to use the expression used in Indonesia: *Aswaja*[75] – as an alternative to other Islamic traditions claiming to be the only true Islam.

9 Excursus: Aswaja

The concept of *Aswaja* is a core concept of the Nahdlatul Ulama. *Aswaja*, although *ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamā'a* is used by the majority of Sunni Muslims, conveys a specific idea. An article from the context of the Wahid Institute, an NGO promoting the ideas of the first democratically elected Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid (d. 2009)[76] states:

> Therefore, and to avoid trapped in over-fanatics to *ahlussunnah wal jama'ah* as a thinking method (*manhaj al fikr*), we need a new paradigm; let us see to it from two aspects. First is from the aspect of vision, and second, from function. From the aspect of vision, *aswaja* is a mean to maintain all the teachings derived from al Quraan and al Sunnah. While from the aspect of function *aswaja* is expected to be able to stop the rate of bloody conflict, war, disunity, and hostility that smeared the history of Islam. […] To reach the goal of those new paradigm there are at least three steps that must be taken. First is the mastery of the ideology of *ahlussunnah wal jama'ah* complete with all the logical arguments and supporting theorems from various texts. Second is the mastery of other school's ideology with all their arguments and mastery of supporting theorems from the resulting texts. Third, is to re-confirm all the information, whether it's an argumentation or text theorems through various approaches. It is so that a true *ahlussunnah wal jama'ah* will be formed, without any doubts in it and without accusing other groups of being wrong, much less deluded.[77]

Hence, *Aswaja* is not only linking Indonesian Islam to the Sunni concept of *ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamā'a* in general but also conveys the idea of a moderate, non-extremist Islam. Positioning Indonesia as the champion of moderate Islam has been part of the Indonesian public diplomacy and soft power efforts in cooperation with NU and Muhammadiyah since 2004. Inside NU there were different positions on the idea of moderate Islam. "Thus, understanding NU's multiple

74 Mustafā et al. 2022, p. 441.

75 E.g., recently Saefuddin and Al Fatihah 2020; Sunoko 2020; Anam et al. 2021.

76 Cf. Barton 2002.

77 Khoiron 2016.

articulations of 'moderate Islam' sheds light on internal power dynamics and the struggle for religious authority and authenticity."[78] Notions discussed in this context are *islam nusantara* and *rahmatan lil alamin* (understood as "a blessing for humankind and the universe").[79]

In recent times a shift to a new epistemological idea of *aswaja* is discernible in the internal discussion of NU: *aswaja an-nahdliyya*. This idea is different from the usual *pesantren* approach to *aswaja* and emerged from Islamic colleges and NGOs.[80] These developments are not discussed here for sake of a limited space.

10 al-ʿIqd al-thamīn Sharḥ al-Fath al-mubīn fī manzūma al-sittīn

Muḥammad Nawawī al-Bantanī (d. 1897 CE/1314 AH), was *the* leading scholar from Western Java. In 1828 he traveled to Mecca to perfom the pilgrimage and continue his studies. He became the Imam of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. He wrote about 115 books covering the fields of *fiqh*, *tawhīd*, *tasawwuf*, interpretation of Qurʿan, and Hadith. He continued to have close contacts with it homeland.[81]

This poem included in the collection analyzed here is a commentary discussing sixty questions concerning Islamic doctrine (*ʿaqīda*) and Shafiʿite law (*fiqh*). Again the importance of commentaries for the development and indigenization of Islam is demonstrated.

The *ʿIqd al-thamīn* offers insights into the discussions in the Indonesian archipelago, thus, illustrating the processes of indigenization. Although appearing as a treatise on the five pillars of Islam with a conservative outlook, hence claiming again adherence to the principles of *Aswaja*. However there are local practices discussed:

> Beating a drum (*tabl*) is allowed (*jāʾiz*) if it signals the coming of the time [of prayer] if it used as an additional sign for [the acceptance of] Islam. On the contrary if it is done to obscure other signs, i.e., if it is done instead of the call to prayer (*adhān*) or the second call to prayer (*iqāma*) not performed. In this case it is reprehensible (*makrūh*) or forbidden (*harām*) according to a Fatwa by Ahmad ibn Dahlān (cf. below).[82]

78 Hoesterey 2018, p. 410.
79 Hoesterey 2018.
80 Thohiri 2019.
81 Cf. recently Bantanī 2022.
82 Mustafā et al. 2022, p. 273.

Al-Bantanī continues that it is also forbidden (or reprehensible) to use a signal wood (*nāqūs*) or a bell like the Christians are doing to call to prayer.[83] Using a drum is still discussed in Indonesia since it is still a well-known practice. Al-Bantanī took the middle ground by allowing to beat the drum but declaring it necessary to call to prayer. Thus, the local tradition is integrated into Islamic practice, an act of indigenization.

A very well acclaimed practice, visiting (*ziyāra*) the grave of the prophet in Medina, this practie is highly recommended and praised. Obviously praising a practice that has been performed in pre-Saudi Arabia times.

Since visiting graves is still practized by traditional Muslims in Indonesia as it has been in the time of writing of this text we read the sub-text as an endorsement of the widespread practice of visiting graves.

11 al-Matn al-sharīf al-mulaqqab bi'l-Fath al-latīf

Muhammad Khalīl al-Bangkalānī (d. 1925 CE/1343 ʾAH) was an influential teacher and played an important role in the emergence of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and was regarded as an inspiration for the founders of NU (Rifaʿi 2010). Among his students were Hasyim Asy'ari (d. 1947 CE), the founder of NU, and Mustofa Bisri, inspiring the creation of the Humanitarian Islam movement, and Ahmad Dahlan (d. 1923 CE) (Mu'thi 2015), the founder of Muhammadiyah, the second largest Islamic organization in Indonesia.

His *al-Matn al-sharīf*[84] is still regarded an important introductory work to Shafiʿite law (*fiqh*). The collection studied here, thus, presents a short text introducing various aspects of applied Shafiʿite law. A short overview allows for a better understanding of this treatise. The text presents the five pillars (*arkān*) of Islam: delaration of faith, prayer, giving alms, fasting in the month of Ramadan, performing the pilgrimage to Mecca. Ever aspect is discussed in detail. One example may illustrate this method:

> The conditions of uttering "God is great" (*allāh akbar*) first time during prayer (*takbīrat al-ihrām*) are seventeen: 1) to pray standing (*qiyām*) according to the ritual obligations (*farḍ*); 2) it has to be in Arabic; 3–4) it should contain the word "God" (*allāh*) and "great" (*akbar*); 5) following the correct sequence (*tartīb*) between both utterances; 6–7) not to apply a *hamza* of *allāh* and the *bāʾ* of *akbar*; 8–9) not to add a *wāw* with a *sukūn* or a vocalized one between the two words; 10–11) not to insert a *wāw* before *allāh* or before *akbar*; 12) not to apply a pause

83 Mustafā et al. 2022, p. 273.

84 For the text as used in pesantren cf. al-Bangkalānī 1409h.

> (*waqfa*) between the two words, be it short or long; 13) let hear all the sounds of *allāhu akbar* to himself; 14) to enter at the fixed time; 15) turning to the *qibla*; 16) do not forget any of the phonetic utterings; 17) do not be late uttering the *takbīr* of the [believer] praying behind the Imam after the *takbīr* of the Imam.[85]

Even though it is tempting to research possible variations of this important formula, we will restrict ourselves to understand this text and its detailed discussion of the expression "God is great", *allāh akbar*, as an attempt to homogenize the linguistic pecularities into a standard form supporting the claim of NU to follow the traditional Sunni worldview.

12 Arbaʿūna hadīth[an] tataʿallaq bi-mabādiʾ jamʿiyyat Nahdat al-ʿulamāʾ

Collections of forty Hadiths do have a long history.[86] For Indonesia, esp., the collection of the Shafiʿite scholar al-Nawawī (d. 1277 CE) is of utmost importance.[87] The text follows this hallowed model by presenting forty Hadiths selected from well-accepted Hadith compilations. Hence, it may be described as a set of basic ideas on belief, general ethical rules, and specific concepts. Thus, the scholars of NU participating in this volume adopt a traditional textual format and claim to be the heirs of a long tradition of Islamic scholarship stressing the legitimacy of their claim.

13 Contextualizing the Texts

The texts studied in this article should not be understood as attempting to articulate a new orthodoxy[88], but as a way of unfolding the web of meanings

85 Mustafā et al. 2022, pp. 328-–329.

86 E.g., Alavi 1984 and 1985.

87 E.g., Siregar 2020.

88 The term orthodoxy is here used according to Shahab Ahmed who wrote: "By orthodoxy, I mean in the first instance any belief, or set of beliefs, including means for arriving at a belief, the proponents of which hold that it is the only valid and correct belief – that is, the only truth, or means for arriving at truth, on that particular matter. However, if we were to stop our definition here, we would not yet have orthodoxy; rather, we have only a claim to orthodoxy from which people may yet dissent. For orthodoxy to obtain as a social fact – that is: for a single truth-claim to establish and maintain itself in society as the sole and exclusive truth – it is necessarily, as a practical matter, for the proponents of that truth-claim to be in a position to impose sanction (which need not necessary be legal sanction) upon dissenters. Orthodoxy, in other words, is not merely an intellectual phenomenon: it is also a social phenomenon – it is, as Talal Asad has famously said, 'not a

inherent in Indonesian Islamic thought. The collection of texts circumscribes the understanding of the process of indigenization of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago by an important part of NU. These texts may be even read as a way of restructuring the field of contemporary Islamic discussion and putting *pribumisasi Islam* in a relation to other contemporary varieties of Islam discussed by Indonesian scholars as pure Islam and liberal Islam. Pure Islam is regarded to claim to be the only representative of universal Islam because they imagine the Arab world of the Prophet Muhammad as the blueprint for universal Islam. Liberal Islam, on the other hand, emphasizes an understanding of pure Islam looking through the prism of Western, i.e., Western and European Islam.[89]

The indigenization of Islam in the form of *pribumi* Islam of indigenous people, if we apply the Indonesian terms, there may be a way to recognize indigenous elements and not only tolerate them. This needs a theological leap that is not easy (Rumadi 2015: 243). In an 'emancipatory mailing list' mentioned by P3M[90] and run at the *yahoogroups* platform[91] we read:

> What is unique about this proposal [pribumi Islam] is not merely that it encourages pribumisasi of Islam, that is bringing Islam down from the 'sky' of its claimed universality to the concrete 'earth' where it gains a foothold, and must deal with a number of plural realities; but that it also recognises that Islam has already set foot on the plain of concrete realities in the lives of Muslims across the world. I believe that pribumi Islam, although it has been allowed to exist in social reality, has not had its theological and epistemological status recognised. Thus acquiescence must be distinguished from recognition. If we want to use a multicultural perspective there is a fundamental difference between acquiescence and recognition. NU does indeed allow elements in pribumi cultures, but perhaps the theological status of these elements, and the status of Islam that has combined with them, is not viewed at the same level as the Islam of the Arabic language classical texts that come from the Arab world and are heavily influenced by Arab culture.[92]

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mere body of opinion, but a distinct relationship – a relationship of power.'" (Ahmed 2017, pp. 3–4) Analyzing orthodoxy as a relation of power links the term to our understanding of reform as reconfiguring the relations of Islamic ideas without leaving the general ideas on Islam but producing a new con-text to hermeneutically engage with the revelation (cf. Ahmed 2016).

89 Rumadi 2015, p. 243.

90 An acronym used for an NGO: the Association of the Development of Islamic Boarding Schools. An organization inside the spectre of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) advocating transformative ideas using traditional terminology (Rumadi 2015, pp. 177–178).

91 Yahoogroups was shut down in 2020 and is no more available. Thus, we have to quote from Rumadi 2015, p. 241 to document these discussions.

92 Rumadi 2015, p. 241.

The author of this post, Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, continues that there is no Islam that is not *pribumi* or indigenized since even at the time of the Prophet Muhammad Islam has been embedded in local culture in this case Mecca and Medina. He says: "There is no Islam that is like cotton, floating in the air, with no known place, like spirits and ghosts."[93] We may read this statement as the position of opposition to that one claiming that Islam has no time and place (*lā zamān wa-lā makān*).

The texts studied here provide ample evidence of the – necessary – process of indigenization of Islam in local cultures and, thus, for a better understanding of the reform of Islamic worldviews in Indonesia symbolized by the term Humanitarian Islam.

14 Humanitarian Islam

The idea of Humanitarian Islam and, recently, *fiqh hadarah*, emerged in recent years in part of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) as a result of the process of promoting moderate Islam mentioned above. The movement's foundational texts were promulgated, esp., by Gerakan Pemuda Ansor,[94] and adopted by NU through a series of mass gatherings in 2019.

The main findings were the need for a transformation of the understanding of the religious obligations of Muslims and the nature of Islamic orthodoxy, recognition of the nation station rathar than the Caliphate, recognizing the rights of *all* citizens, abolition of the category of *kāfir*, etc.

The development of the Humanitarian Islam movement is best understood as a reaction to globalization, the emergence of terrorist movements which are active in the Muslim world (in Southeast Asia, too) and the need to counter the influence of the Wahhabi and Salafi movements as those of politicized Islam perceived as a threat to a genuine Indonesian Islam. These ideas were operationalized globally by the NGO Bayt al-Rahmah[95] and Gerakan Pemuda Ansor to "export a modernized version of Islam"[96] and supported by the current Indonesian government.

93 Rumadi 2015, p. 242.

94 Gerakan Pemuda Ansor is an autonomous body of Nahdlatul Ulama which is engaged in youth and social affairs. Its membership is estimated to be around 8 million and it oversees several sub-organizations. Gerakan Pemuda Ansor was founded in 1934.

95 See online at: Baytarrahmah.

96 Cochrane 2017.

15 Conclusion

Although we are not able to analyze all the texts in the collection at hand in *one* chapter some remarks may be useful. The texts analyzed and the other texts of the collection share the main outlook: 1) an understanding of Islam as a religion of compassion and mercy, 2) the localization or indigenization of Islam (including the necessity of understanding Islam as plural and multicentric), and 3) claiming that NU and Indonesian Islam and, esp., the idea of *islam nusantara* are representing the Sunni traditions of Islam, thus, universalizing the localized and indigenized aspects of Islam.

The Islamic reform project by the texts presented in this collection is based on the claim of mastery of the Indonesian Sunni traditions based on a wide range of Islamic disciplines from Sufism, *kalām*, Shafiʿite law, Hadith, *tafsīr*, Arabic language, and a diversity of modern texts. This claim is based on some principles like Islam understood as mercy (*rahma*) to all mankind and interpreted as the fundamental principle of religious plurality, the indigenization of Islam in Indonesia being the localized foundation for an approach making the localized diversity a universal principle, and based on a thorough knowledge of traditional Islam being the foundation of a productive re-reading of this tradition.

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Fiqh Reconsidered

Indigenization and Universalization of Islamic Law in Indonesia

Rüdiger Lohlker

Abstract

The development of Islamic law (fiqh) can be described as a process of indigenization of the law transmitted from the Middle East to the Malayo-Indonesian archipelago. This development will be reconstructed with special regard to the concept of maqasid al-shari'a. The last outcome of this development is the idea of Humanitarian Islam.

Key Words

Humanitarian Islam, Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama, Indigenization

1 Introductory Remark[1]

Often ignored because of the preoccupation in Europe with the development in the Arab world, Turkey and Iran, the important, paradigmatic case of Islamic law, to be more precise: *fiqh*, in Indonesia, may help to answer the following questions: to what extent can religious freedom, universal human rights and the rule of law be integrated in the legal conceptions of religious traditions? Can religions derive argumentative resources thereof against (renewed) political appropriation? In order to understand *Islam nusantara*,[2] Islam in the Indonesian archipelago, as the living process[3] of adapting to ever-changing circumstances,[4] and not a mere collection of texts dear to any legal historian,

1 This chapter was first published in International Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society 7 (2021), pp. 188–208.

2 To give an idea of the discussion see, e.g., Bisri and Taylor 2012; Azra 2004; Qomar 2015; Khabibi 2016; Susanto/Karimullah 2016; Arifianto 2016; Hasyim 2018.

3 Thanks to C. Holland Taylor for stressing this point.

4 To mention some contextual elements: For a recent study of the emergence of a new popular and visual culture in Indonesia see Schmidt 2017. The impact of these societal changes on the development of fiqh discussions are still to be discussed. A similar case is the vivid pilgrimage culture in Java that has been regarded as a constant rebuke of Islamic rigidity and

there are some crucial texts that we can consult and that will help to conceptualize this living Indonesian Islam. The most important recent document is called the *Gerakan Permuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam* – however, there are other documents to be discussed.

2 Ijtihād

This declaration is based on the idea of a new contemporary *ijtihād*[5] being able to augment the existent (i.e., classical) body of legal opinions, particularly in regard to certain areas in which enormous change has occurred in recent centuries. In the history of Islamic law, *ijtihād* is understood as the process of this reasoning about "extracting a rule from the subject matter of revelation while following the principles and procedures established in legal theory".[6] But *ijtihād* is not understood in Classic Islamic Law as all-encompassing. Wael Hallaq said:

> We have already intimated that the province of legal reasoning and interpretation, properly called *ijtihād*, does not extend over the entire range of the law. Excluded from this province is a group of texts which unambiguously state the legal rules of a number of cases. The certainty (*qat'*) generated by these texts ab initio precludes any need for reinterpretation. Some cases in point are the prohibitions imposed, by textual decree, on adultery, homosexuality, and consumption of grape-wine. Also excluded are those cases subject to consensus, the sanctioning instrument that generates certainty. In all other spheres of the law, *ijtihād* is not only admissible but is also considered a religious duty incumbent upon those in the community who are learned enough to be capable of performing it; this duty is known as *fard kifāya*.[7]

Thus, in classical Sunni methodology *ijtihād* is *not* regarded as a non-restrictive tool for the development of juridical ideas. In Indonesia, we witnessed the emergence of a claim for a new, non-restrictive *ijtihād*. This new *ijtihād* is embedded in a view of the process of Islam in Indonesia as "Indigenization of Islam" (*pribumisasi Islam*)[8] that is intended to avoid polarization between

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exclusivism (see Quinn 2019, pp. 51–56) with a very illuminating case of an application or non-application of a legal statement (fatwa) on the qibla. And for the background of our discussion of developments in fiqh, esp., in Nahdatul Ulama (NU) circles a book on the debate on post-traditionalism: Rumadi 2015.

5 We are using a simplified transcription adopting the quotations to this simplified system.

6 Hallaq 1997, p. 117; see Lohlker 2016, p. 185.

7 Hallaq 1997, p. 117; see Lohlker 2016, pp. 185 et seq.

8 Cf. Wahid, Pribumisasi Islam; see also Wahid 2007.

religion (and law) and Indonesian culture. This is not the place to follow the ramifications of the Islamic and non-Islamic debate on *ijtihād*. This analysis stresses the Indonesian dimension of this debate. Any inclusion of the discussion in North Africa, Southwest Asia or South Asia would prevent a thorough understanding of the specifity of the Indonesian debate. Reconceptualizing the web of contemporary Islamic thought and practice has to avoid an inclusion of, e.g., Middle Eastern ideas that would affirm the idea of a domination of Middle Eastern ideas in the Islamic world, a faulty approach, since the Indonesian debate constitutes itself against this domination (cf. below).

3 Shahab Ahmed

To put it more systematically and to include a perspective reaching beyond the Malayo-Indonesian archipelago, we may follow Shahab Ahmed's groundbreaking reflections that help to reconceptualize Islam in a context that is non-Arabic, but stretching out to Southeast Asia and to all of the Persianate world.[9] A lengthy quotation may be allowed since the present text is not a linear text cut into several sections to follow the structure of conventional texts. The structure is an interconnected rhizomatic[10] web of ideas much more appropriate to a world of ideas stretching beyond the clear-cut boundaries of Islamic disciplines or the idea of well-defined regional systems of thought influencing each other.

> Thus, the philosophers' identification of the fundamental importance of self-knowledge resounds fully with the goal of the Sufi project which is to attain to just such a level of *cosmic* or *divine self-knowledge* – as is summed up in the famous Hadith that has served as a Sufi motto: 'Whoso knows his self knoweth his Lord [*man ʿarafa nafsa-hu fa-qad ʿarafa rabba-hu*].' My point, though, is that this *sense of the relationship between self and meaning* is not a rarefied conceit confined to closed social circles of Sufis and philosophers, but rather a widespread and normal expression and condition of the human and historical fact and experience of being Muslim down the centuries. We should thus not at all be surprised to find that the seventeenth-century leader of the Khaṫak tribe of Pashtūns, Khwushhāl Khān Khaṫak (1613–1689), begins his thoroughly down-to-earth manual for virtuous living entitled *Dastārnāmah* (*Book of the Turban*), which he authored in Pashtō, 'as instruction and advice for my children, brothers, friends and lovers', with a chapter entitled 'The First Quality: Self-Knowledge

9 Ahmed refers to the Balkans to Bengal-complex as an alternative to the Arab Islam dominating the discussion of Islamic history. Southeast Asia is not explicitly part of this complex. Sometimes Ahmed passingly refers to it.

10 For a presentation of the rationale of this epistemological approach cf. Lohlker 2012.

> [*jān pīzhandgalvī*]'. This chapter sets forth by immediately citing the Hadith, 'Whoso knows himself knoweth his Lord,' followed by a Pashtō translation and gloss in simple rhyme: 'He who has come to know his self – he has come to know God; He who does not know his self does not know God'. Khwushhāl Khān's opening statement indicates not only the extent to which the philosophical-Sufi amalgam pervades and grounds the *paideia* of the societies of Muslims of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex, but also how, in consequence thereof, *self-knowledge* was high on the agenda of Muslims acting as Muslims. The full cognizance of the challenges posed to the Muslim individual by engagement in this *exploratory* undertaking is straightforwardly presented by the anonymous seventeenth-century author of 'one of the most important single documents in the history of the development of Sufi thought in the Indonesian countries,' a didactic poem in Javanese entitled *The Gift Addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet* (itself an adaptation and elaboration of the Arabic work of the same title by the Gujarātī author, Muhammad al-Burhānpūrī [d. 1620]), who said in introducing his audience of adepts to the idea of self-knowledge: 'This is difficult and dangerous, perilous and hard to accept except with guidance. The Prophet of God declares: 'Whosoever knows his self there upon knows his Lord' [...] if you do not know your self you cannot know God.' My point here is trying to emphasize this conceptualization in history by Muslims of being Muslim (that is, of human and historical Islam) as the 'difficult and dangerous' *exploration* of meaning for the Self – a conceptualization all too often lost in the habitual privileging of *prescriptive* discourses over explorative discourses of meaning – and thus to emphasize the importance of paying due attention, when thinking about Islam or when using the word Islamic, to the larger significance to societies of Muslims of such explorative self-statements [...].[11]

We will have to emphasize that this quest to acquire self-knowledge is not only part of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex but also essential for Southeast Asia. To understand the changes in Indonesian *fiqh*, we will have to do what Ahmed prescribes, leaving the "habitual privileging of prescriptive discourses" and "paying due attention" to non-juridical aspects of the understanding of Muslims and their practices of self-exploration. We have to emphasize that this is a process quite normal to the history of Islam and Islamic law.

Our exploration of Indonesian *fiqh* starts with an outline of the characteristics of Islamic law in Indonesia that is often ignored in histories of Islamic law and in histories of law in general. It will move to the profound changes that took place within this variant[12] of Islam in the twentieth/twenty-first century. The intense conflicts starting in the 1990s and confronting political Islam/Wahhabism/Salafism and *Islam nusantara* will inform the background of the juridical discussion of the recent developments mentioned above. *Islam*

11 Ahmed 2016, p. 335.

12 I am referring to the idea of variantology coined by Zielinski (see Lohlker 2017a).

nusantara and its related concepts framing the concepts of *fiqh* is contextualized in this vein in an ongoing confrontation with what is understood in important parts of the Indonesian Islamic communities as Arabism, rooted in Middle Eastern culture, i.e., a confrontation with Islam in the tradition of the Muslim Brotherhood, Wahhabism/Salafism,[13] and Jihadism.[14] This conceptualization includes important theological and mystical aspects of Indonesian Islam, especially the centrality of compassion (*rahma*).[15] We are not discussing all different aspects of the debate on *fiqh* in Indonesia. Neither the statements of political Islamic, Salafi/Wahhabi and Jihadi tendencies will be part of our analysis, nor will the local and provincial legislation be. We are following the process of "Indigenization of Islam" (*pribumisasi Islam*) mentioned above.

4 History of Islamic Law in Indonesia

Thinking about Islam and *fiqh* in Southeast Asia does not mean giving a privilege to the study of normative, prescriptive Islam such as *fiqh*. We will have to take into account that the history of Islam in Southeast Asia was different from its history in Southwest Asia and North Africa as mentioned by Ahmed. Further, Peter Riddell says about the importance of Sufism in the early period of Southeast Asian Islam:

> Scholars such as Hamzah Fansuri, Shams al-Din al-Sumatrani and ʿAbd al-Raʿuf al-Singkili ensured that Sufi thought was to play a central role in defining the face of Islam in Southeast Asia. Indeed, in this way the Malay world has played a unique role in terms of the wider Muslim world. Whereas in the Middle East, Sufism had only emerged in a systematic way several centuries after the Islamisation process of the Arab world was complete,[16] in the Malay world Sufism came to be normative during the formative years. As Bakar says, 'Sufism's greatest contribution to Malay civilization lies in shaping and crystallizing its intellectual and spiritual milieu during the later phase of the Islamisation process, from the ninth/fifteenth century until about the end of the twelfth/eighteenth century.'[17]

13 Wahhabism and Salafism are understood as inextricably linked phenomena (cf. Lohlker 2020).

14 A milieu we have called exclusivist in a former article (cf. Lohlker 2017b). The tendencies mentioned are part of this common milieu trying to dominate Islamic societies.

15 This is not the place to delve into the ramifications of this idea.

16 Whether this picture of Islamization is accurate should be discussed, but there is no place to do it here. (RL)

17 Riddell 2001, pp. 168 et seq.

Although we know about the importance of the literature of *fiqh* in early modern Southeast Asia until the 19th century,[18] a thorough study of this literature still has to be carried out. We will have to restrict our exploration to some general remarks. As Hooker wrote about the legacy of Islam (and Islamic law) in Southeast Asia putting the context we tried to describe above in other terms:

> The key notion to keep in mind in assessing this legacy is the idea of selection. As with other Muslim lands outside the Arab heartland, the recipient cultures selected from the classical heritage that which they found useful or appropriate. This does not mean that the provincial cultures were, or are, less 'Muslim'. On the contrary, belief and identity as 'Muslim' are as strong in South-east Asia as in Arabia. It does, however, mean that the local cultural and language forms determined what Islam meant locally. In the broad sweep of Muslim history one can truly speak of 'Islams' just as one would speak of various forms of Christianity. The *umma* is one but the expression of the faith is culturally defined. There is no dispute about this as a fact, but there have always been movements from within Islam to minimise or do away with the cultural variations which have existed for centuries.[19]

The early modern law texts in Southeast Asia date back several centuries. This vast literature shows us the "purposeful selection"[20] made during the process of indigenization of Islamic law in Southeast Asia. A good example of this process would be a Malayan[21] law text,

> *Undang-Undang Melaka* [...], which dates from the 17th century and was the most influential text for the succeeding two centuries. The text is short and has three parts, which respectively deal with debt and debt bondage, marriage and divorce and property rights. The first and the last represent local custom (*adat*) whilst marriage and divorce are recognisably derived from Islamic law. Perhaps most interesting is an interpolated section, which classifies the sources of law as (a) reason, (b) Islam and (c) customs of the country. A diversity of sources is recognised and, where there is conflict or inconsistency, then the Islamic element is ranked lower than the other two. The evidence from this text and other, later Malay-Muslim texts is that Islam was not the only source for law in the Muslim sultanates. While the genealogies of these sultanates lay great stress on relationships with the West Asian (that is, Middle Eastern) countries of Arab/Islamic culture, this is not followed through in the law texts. Both, however, were produced at the same time and commissioned by the same ruler(s) and must, therefore, be read together. The result of this reading is to show that source and selection of Islamic principle is not haphazard or incompetent. On the contrary it shows a degree of originality in using Islamic principle for a purpose, namely

18 See Azra 2004.

19 Hooker 2002, p. 215.

20 Hooker 2002, p. 215.

21 Referring to the linguistic sphere and not to the contemporary political sphere.

> to legitimise the ruler by reference to Islam. The religion here meant not just revelation but also attachment to the 'superior' West Asian civilisation. Some of the Malay-Muslim texts, in fact, include genealogies relating the texts' patrons to famous, ideal rulers of that area. While these might be fanciful in the historical sense, they were real for these who commissioned them. One might call these efforts 'myth' but, on another level, myths can also state truths. In our example, it is the illustration of the assimilation of foreign legal values. Of course the result is inconsistent but that is inevitable in any sort of cultural borrowing.[22]

Scholars of the 19th century imperial powers read this structure as a corruption of the 'real', 'pure' Islamic law, a dichotomy now convincingly criticized by Ahmed (see above) as ossifying Islam as a mere prescriptive system mirroring the views of parts of modern Islamic movements and taking these views as a genuine expression of Islam. Thus, this former state of research did not grasp the process of "exploration of meaning for the Self" described by Ahmed (see above) leading to the creation of the idea of *Islam nusantara* and Humanitarian Islam in Indonesia.

One influential conceptualization for Indonesia was created by Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje when he formulated his famous systematic opposition distinguishing in all societal domains *adat* (custom) and *hukum* (Islamic law, *fiqh*). This opposition was criticized for many years; for our purposes we may state that this systematic opposition oversimplifies the situation in Aceh[23] and ignores the process of purposeful selection and exploration (see above).[24] Now, going back in time: By the end of the 18th century, the Islamic literature in general had expanded in Southeast Asia which still has to be studied in detail. There was a vast amount of literature trying to define sovereignty and rule.

> In the earlier texts God's revealed message is subordinated to Islam used as a definition of sovereignty. The patrons of these earlier texts were theologically illiterate but there is nothing new in this – present day politicians are, after all, usually constitutionally illiterate. By the end of the 18th century, however, a much greater degree of theological understanding can be shown; but, at the same time, the tension between the absoluteness of revelation and local cultural realities remained unresolved.[25]

During colonialism, especially Dutch colonialism for Indonesia, European legal imperialism was successful in reducing Islamic law to a personal religion

22 Hooker 2002, p. 216.

23 Snouck Hurgronje referred to Aceh, an Indonesian province, taking it as a case valid for all of Indonesia.

24 See Roff 1985, pp. 10 et seq.

25 Hooker 2002, p. 216.

and to the confines of personal status law bureaucratizing Islamic law in the form of Islamic courts that did not have a sizeable impact on *fiqh*. This system was transformed into the "Republic of Indonesia", reframing the Muslim legal discussion.[26] This is not the place to discuss the history of Indonesian law in detail, but we can merely assume that it is justified to call the legal practice of Indonesia pluralistic. The "irreducible pluralism" of legal practice in Indonesia has been described by Bowen as:

> Indonesian efforts to coexist through sustained public reasoning, a restless, endless process of deliberation, intended sometimes to accommodate others, sometimes to exclude them. I began in Isak, a small enough place, where if there were to be normative resting places in large nation-states, we might expect to find one. But Isak people, like their fellow citizens elsewhere, find themselves grappling with criss-crossing sets of norms, some of which have the backing of the state (and thus can be said to be 'law'), others of which have their normative anchors in the past or the local present.[27]

This irreducible legal pluralism combined with the specific Indonesian way of exploring the meaning of Islam leaves space for a theoretical, non-juridical discussion on *fiqh*. But: As Hooker asked in the introduction we quoted: "Is there no *fiqh* response to the challenge of modernity?"[28] A case study of this kind of "*fiqh* response" may be the discussion on an Indonesian school of law (*madhhab*)[29] based on thoughts about inheritance law:

> The parallel between the earliest phase of growth of Islamic law and the present era lies in the fact that Islamic law is once again undergoing a process of intense borrowing and exchange similar to that which occurred at its creation. Doctrines and institutes whose provenance is outside of Islam are once again impinging on Islamic law. The future viability of Islamic jurisprudence depends in part on whether and how these new ingredients can be accommodated within the tradition. The question facing Islamic law is whether the achievements of the seventh and eighth centuries can be repeated in the twenty-first, and Islamic legal theory can once again assert its assimilating power to bring the ideals and institutions of modern society within an Islamic frame of reference.
>
> The movement to create an Indonesian school of Islamic inheritance doctrine can be seen as part of renegotiating the terms of Islamic law to adapt the tradition to the conditions of modern life. The inheritance scheme advocated by the reformers is a self-consciously original construction intended as an Islamic inheritance law suited to the needs of contemporary Indonesian society. Unlike much contemporary Islamic legislation, which is based on ad hoc selection from

26 For a general overview see Feener 2007.

27 Bowen 2003, p. 253.

28 Hooker 2002, p. 230.

29 For a critique of the concept of "school" of law, see Lohlker 2017.

> recognized doctrines or manipulation of existing institutions, the Indonesian scheme of bilateral inheritance is unapologetically modern. Though progress toward the development of a modern Islamic legal theory has been more tentative, the outlines of an Indonesian Islamic jurisprudence are discernible, even if its details are not yet agreed upon. The basic premise of the approach are the belief in an Indonesian cultural exceptionalism, and Hazairin's insight that all interpretations of legal authorities are and should be shaped by historical and cultural conditioned interpretive categories. As yet, however, there is no convincing or agreed upon methodology for defining the limits of that principle or incorporating it within a coherent legal theory.[30]

Part of this discussion on a new inheritance law is, according to Cammack,[31] a double endeavor: to be accepted as Islamic *and* Indonesian. Thus, the rationale of this proposal is to create an Indonesian Islamic identity, an idea that goes quite well with the idea of *Islam nusantara*.

Speaking in terms of legal methodology and taking up the idea of new *ijtihād*, we will have to turn to some methodological or hermeneutical issues. This aspect of the Indonesian discussion we have to look into is described by Kersten:

> [...] fundamental intellectual debates on the role of religion in Muslim societies revolve around this central and yet illusively abstract notion of shari'a. Moreover, friend and foe are also in agreement that fiqh – jurisprudence – was and actually still is the queen of sciences within traditional Islamic learning. When discussing the NU's[32] continuous reinterpretation of the meaning of *Aswaja*,[33] I already touched on the fact that *fiqh* was identified as the best developed discipline in comparison with the two other parts of its intellectual triad: theology (*kalam*) and sufism (*tasawwuf*). Correspondingly, the rethinking of the NU's role following the decision to return to the *Khittah* 1926 is characterized as 'the total *fiqh* approach'. In this context, fiqh should not just be understood as referring to jurisprudence in a narrow legalistic sense. The opponents of the formal Islamization of Indonesia's legal system have a more expansive view of shari'a. Instead of dealing with juridical technicalities – or debating the foundations underlying the practice of jurisprudence, a methodological sub-discipline known as *usul al-fiqh* – they advocate an even more fundamental philosophical discussion on the objectives underlying shari'a as a conceptualization of equity and justice. This further abstraction takes the whole matter of legal thought into the domains of philosophy, in particular hermeneutics and ethics. Since the classical era this has

30 Cammack 2015, p. 189.

31 See Cammack 2015, pp. 189 et seq.

32 Nahdatul Ulama, the world's largest Muslim organization. (RL)

33 A central concept of the more recent discussions of NU. It is an abbreviation of Ahl as-Sunna wa'l-jamā'a and denotes a field of interpretation of how the idea of being a 'middle community' that is moderate is to be understood and which methodology (manhaj) is the outcome of this self-understanding. (RL)

> been dealt with by another sub-discipline within the tradition of Islamic learning, known as *maqasid al-shari'a* – the 'higher objectives of shari'a'.[34]

Maqāsid al-sharī'a,[35] the higher objectives, are often referred to together with *maslaha*, the purpose of Islamic law.[36] Both concepts are understood – to give a broad definition – as developing choice and preferences in an Islamic law perspective according to the higher interests of the Islamic community.

5 Maqāsid al-Sharī'a and the Indonesian Debate

An important methodical instrument for rethinking *usūl al-fiqh* in Indonesia[37] today is this idea of the priority of the higher objectives of Islamic law, the *maqāsid al-sharī'a*, in the following text translated as "basic aims".[38] A very succinct formulation of an Indonesian view on the *maqāsid* is to be found in the introduction of the *Gender Mainstreaming Team* to a text called "Reforming Islamic Law" (*Pembaruan Hukum Islam*):

> In the [new] formulation of sharia all citizens have the same status and access to justice; minorities and women are protected and guaranteed equal rights. The formulations are based on the basic aims of Sharia Islam (*maqashid al-syari'at*), that is, to establish values and principles of social justice, the welfare of the community of human beings, universal compassion and local wisdom. It has been prepared in Indonesian with current idioms, not Arabisms, and can be understood by Indonesians.[39]

Nevertheless, the *maqāsid* are from a restrictive point of view of *fiqh* not to be understood as a principle overruling every other ruling. Even trying to rethink *fiqh* according to new paradigms like "social *fiqh* will be restricted by what is understood as the "classical paradigm" and anxiety "to go too far or uproot *fiqh* from its orthodoxy tradition".[40] M. A. Sahal Mahfudh[41] concludes his article on social *fiqh*:

---

34 Kersten 2015, pp. 179 et seq.
35 The vast literature on maqāsid cannot be discussed here.
36 See for a history of this concept Opwis 2010.
37 For an overview see Khoiri 2017.
38 In Indonesian it is maqashid al-syari'at.
39 The translation in Fealy and Hooker 2006, pp. 148 et seq.
40 Fealy and Hooker 2006, p. 161.
41 Former president of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the largest Muslim organization worldwide.

> For this purpose, we need to make efforts of paradigmatic change within religious practical, that being *fiqh*. The paradigmatic change in viewing *fiqh* is a must. *Fiqh* cannot be seen just as a tool to measure the truth of orthodox religion, but must also be considered as a tool that can read social reality. In this case, *fiqh* has a dual function, firstly as a tool to measure social reality with shari'ah ideals, concluding with the decision of *halal* and *haram* laws, permitted or prohibited: and secondly at the same time it becomes a tool for social engineering. Within the science of law, there is always a dual function, the function of law as social control and as social engineering.
> Both the functions of *fiqh* mentioned will only be made possible if the products and thinking of *fiqh* are developed contextually. Contextual *fiqh* approaches can be carried out, by putting the products of *fiqh* within classical texts and academic life in their present and respective contexts. The products of *fiqh* can become models to develop *madhhab qawli*. The contextual *fiqh* approach can also work by expanding the *madhhab* perspective, through the application of *usul al-fiqh* and *fiqh* norms, as well as, through the integration of *'illat* (reasoning) and the benefit (*hikmah*).[42]

We easily detect the key elements hampering any further development of the thinking about *fiqh* even in advanced approaches like that of social *fiqh* advocated here. The predominance of putting ideas within the framework of "classical texts" and the introduction of "shari'ah ideals" as a regulating idea for contextualizing *fiqh* is a key element. These elements easily allow for a reconfiguring of *fiqh* as an ossified element in Muslim societies even if the author advocates *maqāsid al-sharī'a* as an important tool for reform.

Even if we are leaving the many articles on *maqāsid* in Islamic Finance, Islamic Economy, bioethics, or medical ethics out, the number of articles devoted to discussions on *maqāsid al-sharī'a* demonstrates the importance of these discussions for the contemporary Indonesian on *fiqh* issues.[43] A significant article on the Indonesian Pancasila constructs it as a contemporary application of *maqāsid al-sharī'a*.[44] Thus, the author demonstrates paradigmatically the indigenization of the methodology of Islamic law. This intense discussion in Indonesia allows, however, for a new flight line to emerge from the older debate moving to new stages of the application of *usūl al-fiqh* and a redefinition of this methodology.

42 Fealy and Hooker 2006, p. 160; the transcription of Arabic words is not homogenized to one system.

43 E.g., Djamil 1995; Ubaidillah 2010; Sabil 2011; Mudzhar 2014; Shafei 2017.

44 See Acac 2015.

6 Turning to the Idea of Humanitarian Islam

The next stage of the unfolding of new lines of flight[45] of the discussion on *usūl al-fiqh* in Indonesia is the emergence of the concept of a *Humanitarian Islam*. This concept was mentioned in the "Decree of the 21st National Conference of *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor"*, the youth wing of the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), in April 2017. The decree summons the organization to:

> Assume a leadership role in a global movement to promote Humanitarian Islam (*al-islam li al-insaniyyah*), by developing and operationalizing a strategy to recontextualize (i.e., reform) the teachings of orthodox, authoritative Islam and thereby address certain problematic elements of *fiqh*, such as:
>
> – Normative practices governing relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, including the rights, responsibilities and role of non-Muslims who live in Muslim-majority societies, and vice versa;
> – Relations between the Muslim and non-Muslim world, including the proper aims and conduct of warfare;
> – The existence of modern nation states and their validity – or lack thereof – as political systems that govern the lives of Muslims; and State constitutions and statutory laws/legal systems that emerged from modern political processes, and their relationship to *shari'ah*.[46]

Following this line of flight, we reach May 22, 2017, an international gathering of nearly 300 Muslim scholars trying to devise a strategy helping to globalize the views developed in the process we sketched before. This gathering promulgated a declaration carrying the idea of a humanitarian Islam in its title.

7 Gerakan Permuda Ansor Declaration

The declaration carries the title *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam: Towards the Recontextualization of Islamic Teachings, for the Sake of World Peace and Harmony Between Civilizations* and is organized in 112 points. The last point summarizes the gist of this declaration:

> From the perspective of *usul fiqh* (the theory of classical Islamic law), this will serve as the legitimate basis for new *ijtihad* that reflects the transformed reality of interfaith relations in the 21st century. The recontextualization of Islamic

45 We are referring to a well-known Deleuzian concept we cannot elaborate on here (see Lohlker 2012).

46 Baytarrahmah, Ansor Decree.

> teachings will, in turn, support efforts to contain religious extremism, resolve conflict and transform educational curricula – thereby fulfilling the purpose of religious norms (*maqasid al-shari'ah*), which is to promote the spiritual and material well-being of humanity.[47]

The declaration by this article 112 focuses on the methodological issues enabling *fiqh* to be transformed and recontextualized in a way it will follow the basic "intentions of the Shariah" or "religious norms" (*maqāsid al-sharī'a*). Thus, the declaration is leaving the confines of the idea of *maqāsid* mentioned above. The final article is building upon the ideas in the contextual points at the beginning of the document:

> 1. In the theory of classical Islamic law (*usul fiqh*), religious norms (*ahkam*; singular, *hukm*) constitute a response to reality. The purpose of religious norms (*maqasid al-shari'ah*) is to ensure the spiritual and material well-being of humanity.
> 2. The authoritative Sunni jurists, Imam al-Ghazali and Imam al-Shatibi, identified five primary components of *maqasid al-shari'ah*, viz., the preservation of faith, life, progeny, reason and property.
> 3. Religious norms may be universal and unchanging – e.g., the imperative that one strive to attain moral and spiritual perfection – or they may be "contingent," if they address a specific issue that arises within the ever-changing circumstances of time and place.
> 4. As reality changes, contingent – as opposed to universal – religious norms should also change to reflect the constantly shifting circumstances of life on earth. This was in fact the case during the early centuries of Islam, as various schools of Islamic law (*madzhab*) emerged and evolved. For the past five centuries, however, the practice of *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning, employed to create new religious norms) has generally lapsed throughout the Sunni Muslim world.
> 5. When contemporary Muslims seek religious guidance, the most widely-accepted and authoritative reference source – indeed, the standard of Islamic orthodoxy – is the corpus of classical Islamic thought (*turats*) – and especially *fiqh* (jurisprudence) – that reached its peak of development in the Middle Ages and was then frozen in place, largely unchanged to the present day.
> 6. A wide discrepancy now exists between the structure of Islamic orthodoxy and the context of Muslims' actual (lived) reality, due to immense changes that have occurred since the teachings of orthodox Islam grew ossified towards the end of the medieval era.
> 7. This disjunct between key tenets of Islamic orthodoxy and the reality of contemporary civilization can, and often does, lead Muslims into physical, moral and spiritual danger, if they insist upon observing certain elements of *fiqh*, regardless of their present context. Among the complex issues that lie at the heart of this discrepancy are:

47 Baytarrahmah, Gerakan Pemuda Ansor.

- Normative practices governing relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, including the rights, responsibilities and role of non-Muslims who live in Muslim-majority societies, and vice versa;
- Relations between the Muslim and non-Muslim world, including the proper aims and conduct of warfare;
- The existence of modern nation states and their validity – or lack thereof – as political systems that govern the lives of Muslims; and
- State constitutions and statutory laws/legal systems that emerged from modern political processes, and their relationship to *shariʿah*.

8. Social and political instability, civil war and terrorism all arise from the attempt, by ultraconservative Muslims, to implement certain elements of *fiqh* within a context that is no longer compatible with said classical norms.

9. Any attempt to establish a universal Islamic state – *al-imamah al-udzma* (the Great Imamate), also known as *al-khilafah* (the Caliphate) – will only lead to disaster for Muslims, as one aspirant battles with another for dominion of the entire Islamic world.[48]

The declaration constructs an interrelation of political, social and religious factors causing the need for a rethinking of *fiqh* following the idea of *maqāsid* interpreted in a non-restrictive manner, a specific *Islam nusantara* approach allowing for a flexible interpretation of *fiqh* that is based on an indigenized understanding, put in a globalized context and universalizing it.

The next milestone was the *Nusantara Manifesto* promulgated on October 25, 2019 by *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor* and the international NGO *Bayt ar-Rahma* in Yogyakarta. The point of this manifesto pertinent to mention in the context of our discussion is summarized as follows:

> Part XI of the Manifesto (points 99–173) employs the science of *uṣūl al-fiqh* – the methodology of independent legal reasoning used to create Islamic law, or *fiqh* – to examine why it is theologically valid and necessary for contemporary Muslim scholars to recontextualize obsolete and problematic tenets within Islamic orthodoxy, which are used to justify religious hatred, supremacy and violence. Section §11.2 explains why changed circumstances necessitate new *ijtihād* to ensure the well-being of humanity (*maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*). Section §11.3 incorporates H.E. Kyai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid's historic essay, "God Needs No Defense," while section §11.5 establishes a framework for the emergence of what the Nusantara Manifesto calls *fiqh al-ḥaḍārah al-ʿālamīyah al-mutaṣahirah* (Islamic jurisprudence for a single, interfused global civilization).[49]

The manifesto incorporates some of the points mentioned in the declaration on humanitarian Islam in a more detailed way. The *Nusantara Manifesto* was discussed at a meeting of seventy Islamic scholars at a prominent Islamic

48 Baytarrahmah, Gerakan Pemuda Ansor.

49 Baytarrahmah, Gerakan Pemuda Ansor.

boarding school and was co-sponsored by the *Gerakan Pemuda Ansor* and its theological wing *Rijalul Ansor*. The meeting was held on January 3, 2019, and discussed the necessities arising from the manifesto. One of the participants K. H. Abu Yazid Bustami, Deputy General Secretary of *Rijalul Ansor*, stated: "The only solution to the crisis facing Muslim communities worldwide is to construct a global *fiqh* that reflects our present reality. We [Nahdlatul Ulama theologians] have the requisite ability, courage and authority to conduct *ijtihad*!!!"[50]

This may be understood as opening a new stage of developing a new *fiqh*, not only adapting to the circumstances of modernity but reclaiming the competence for a new *ijtihād* from movements emerging in the Middle East since the 19th century. The last result of this ongoing process is a short statement called *Nusantara Statement* promulgated by *Ansor* at a mass rally on November 22, 2018, on the occasion of the birthday of the prophet (*mawlid*)[51] and attended by the Indonesian president Joko Widodo. The statement reads:

> We call upon people of goodwill of every faith and nation to join in building a global consensus to prevent the political weaponization of Islam, whether by Muslims or non-Muslims, and to curtail the spread of communal hatred by fostering the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order, founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being.[52]

Thus, we witness a seemingly technical debate on the methodology of *fiqh* in Indonesia turning into a religio-political statement with a potentially global impact. We may understand this statement as the final proof of indigenization *cum* globalization *cum* universalization of *fiqh* in Indonesia.

Hence, it is possible to understand this process of indigenization as the development of a genuine Indonesian school of thought[53] beginning to operate at a global level and claiming Islam as part of the universal values of humanity and not excluding other Islamic and non-Islamic parts of the global society.

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50 Baytarrahmah, Islamic jurisprudence for a global civilization.

51 See Kaptein 1993a; Katz 2007 Kaptein 1993b; Woodward 2011.

52 Baytarrahmah, Blocking the political weaponization of Islam.

53 Against possible misunderstandings we have to stress that we are not talking about an existing Indonesian madhhab.

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